

A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL

Chroma

Stories - Poetry - Art - Issue 6 - Spring 2007



A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL **Chroma** Issue 6 • Spring 2007

PO Box 44655
London N16 0WQ
+44 20 7193 7642
chroma@chromajournal.co.uk

Editor
SHAUN LEVIN

Poetry Editor
SARADHA SOOBRAYEN

Commissioning Editors
**ANDRÁS GEREVICH, SOPHIE MAYER,
ANDREW THEOPHILOU, MICHAEL UPTON**

Assistant Editors
PARISA EBRAHIMI, ANDRA SIMONS

Events Manager
DEEPNA SETHI

Designer
RAFFAELE TEO

COVER

Front: Kobi Israel, *kobi-israel.com*

Back: Sadie Lee, *Holly Woodlawn Dressing III*, oil on canvas,
48" x 36" (2007)

Chroma (ISSN 1744-7801) is published twice a year with the financial support of Arts Council England, London.

Subscriptions are £9.00 a year in the UK, £14.00 elsewhere (cheques payable to "Queer Writers and Poets").

©2007 Poetry, prose, artwork, and design rights return to the artists upon publication. No part of this publication may be duplicated without the permission of the individual artists or the editors.

Opinions expressed in *Chroma* are not necessarily those of the editors or of Queer Writers and Poets. Manuscripts submitted to *Chroma* must be original typescript or clear photocopies and will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Please refer to the submission guidelines on the website before sending in work.

Letters to the editor are welcome. Please send them to the address above, or to editor@chromajournal.co.uk.

www.chromajournal.co.uk

printed in Cornwall by Headland Printers, 01736 364 694

02



Chroma: Island

Stories

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------|
| 04 | Small Dog Seeks Big Bone | MARK WAGSTAFF |
| 07 | An Anti-War Feminist Activist Lesbian Goes on Holiday in Her ex-Homeland ex-Yugoslavia | LEPA MLADJENOVIC |
| 11 | I Want You to Come to My House | GEORGE ARISTIDPOULOS |
| 19 | Revolution | MICHAEL SUTHERLAND |
| 25 | Eternal Sunshine | THERESA HEATH |
| 28 | Three Mazurkas | CAR HILLS |
| 32 | QueerBashers | MICKY SILVER |
| 39 | House Sitting | LISA ASAGI |
| 44 | Earl's Court Trilogy | ALEXANDRA MANKOWITZ |
| 46 | Currawong Crónica | SUSANA CHÁVEZ-SILVERMAN |
| 51 | Octopus Sushi | AN XIAO |
| 53 | Lemon Creek | LOU DELLAGUZZO |

Poetry

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 06 | Kalami | MARIA JASTRZEBSKA |
| 09 | What It's Like, After All | CHRISTOPHER NIELD |
| 14 | Mandraki | LYNN FOOTE |
| 14 | Somewhere Other than the Sea | JENNY THOMPSON |
| 16 | Bare Backing | BRIAN CRONWALL |
| 17 | London Drizzle | ALAN C. SMITH |
| 38 | The Gentle Art of Persuasion | JAY BERNARD |
| 40 | Women Jumping | WENDY FRENCH |
| 45 | Hurricane | JIM NAWROCKI |
| 49 | Easdale | LUCY BURNETT |

Art

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 10 | Reshuffling the Self | RYAN RIDDINGTON |
| 15 | Our House | IRRAS HAN |
| 16 | Drawings | ANGEL CORTEZ |
| 18 | Andaman Coast Café | NADIA ATTURA |
| 24 | La Sierra, The Heath | CARLOS MOLINA |
| 29 | The Last Time | SAMUEL HODGE |
| 30 | Neurotic Narcissism | PETER IBRUEGGER |
| 37 | Collective Individuality | BELDAN SEZEN |
| 41 | It's All Yours | CARLOS MOLINA |
| 42 | Pin the Blame on the Donkey | SIMON LEAH |
| 48 | Don't Touch My Individuality | BELDAN SEZEN |
| 50 | Working Out | LYNNE JAMNECK |

58 Biographies

Small Dog Seeks Big Bone

Mark Wagstaff

04

Parties to crash: after work drinks, gallery openings, secret gigs, if you like sweat. Red carpet movies.

Parties you wouldn't crash: fashion shows, where it's all wonderful, *darling*; anything fronted by vicars who ain't strippers; anything bussing tea in greasy urns. Charity shit.

Parties you should never crash: exes' weddings, funerals of people you hate, kids' birthdays, with or without clowns. Other people's anniversary dinners.

I'm a world of parties, all round me, always. On the bus of a morning - trying like the good lord fuck for glamour, to stay pretty - the all-night top-deck crew are a party of their own. The security guy when I get to work - always in the whitest shirt, always bussing his toothbrush - he's a party, in his clubby room, the telly on too loud. The kids next door, getting me nostalgic with their devotion to Saturday night.

Parties I've crashed: not many. Not since I fixed on being a single man. Time was, I'd lig anything. But desperation's got a scent, an aroma so rotty a sixty-a-day man could taste it. Stevie smoked sixty. More. He was a masterpiece of smoking. He'd smoke the same way I swish my arse: for medicine, for glamour. Not like me, he was good at all that: being loud, getting loved. He was a party, and like the man said, parties ain't meant to last. But some do. Stay with you, when the lights are killed, when the cigarette smoke has faded.

I get up early, go to work, try to be glamorous with it. Yeah, I know: if you have to try, you ain't got it. Stevie said that. I'm the one with the placcy bag of supermarket crap where, if I was glamorous, I'd buy nothing but flowers. Slop around at home in grubby jeans where, if I'd true glamour, I'd be dollied even when no one sees. Hate my weight, have dinner, and hate myself all the more.

You shouldn't stalk people, and I don't. Not much. Not like when I had more hair, less chin, and many an unsuspecting lad was trailed down the passage. I've never been brilliant at sorting out who might and might not be interested in me. In telling when people's niceness was just niceness, nothing

more. I always kinda thought someday I'd get swept off my feet, the good fairy of random strangers sprinkling stardust on my steps. Stevie met people. All the time. They gathered to him. Straights and girls got crazy, one look of his party face. I kidded I was the deep one, thoughtful in his shadow. Well-deluded. I wasn't even that close.

You shouldn't wander nights in streets where you've no business. Sometimes, after work, I'll chase myself down the bright lights, cruising past the pubs of men, spilling their flesh and honey. Never go in. Even my age - and, darling, I don't *talk* about my age - even now, the thought of pushing in, jostling to the bar, begging a scrap of the barman's attention, and then getting shipwrecked in strangers' parties, makes me nervous. What drives, if I was Stevie and not just little Mark, is the promise of getting some. I don't. Not ever. I say that I love being single too much. Tell the girls at work I'm choosy. Remind myself all the times I did, and went home feeling useless. Feeling I'd wasted a night on a man who didn't know what I was *for*.

But it's process fucks me: that whole business of meeting people, being *new* with people. That thing where they look, then look away. I can't do it. I think sometimes what it used to be like to have the arms of a someone around me. When I stare in the mirror and understand my spray-on glamour, wasted. So I cruise past those pubs. Cruise back. Go home. Glad of a lucky escape.

Parties where I shouldn't: fuck, how long we got? Some guys have it, don't they? Credit: from the get go. They draw goodwill they don't have to pay back. When I followed round after Stevie - heaven forbid we'd do anything like go out together - they'd gather to gift him affection. No prettyboy, but, slim, clever-faced, sharp-tongued, he sucked attention. Cold, and a bitch, and I wanted to lick him where the sun don't shine. There was a queue. Somehow my ticket got switched. In from the start when we were just kids. Then suddenly all these people had his time ahead of me. Never took my eyes off him once, but still, the carnival was gone. Better, they say, to live than regret; I don't regret knowing Stevie. It was my party fell flat

on its arse; me who should've proved I was worthy. Me all over: I never know where to begin.

I walk up and down, go home, tell myself I'm lucky. Another day's lucky escape from involvement, another night without morning, when it comes, and someone leaving out the door. Stevie knew my triggers: he played me. I say that with love, not anger. I was there to be played. Told him, with my skin and bones, my eyes and smile, to use me. A million miles deep in him. Gave everything I owned. It's the smallest step, from thinking of someone all the time to hiding in shadows, watching. He'd go out, to the bus stop, the station, and I'd say: I'll walk with you, wait the train, the bus. See you to work and pick you up. Do nothing in between. I'll edge your days with my skin, my want. I'll be your dog.

I needed to core inside his life, to get his life in me. I grew this seventh Stevie-sense: where he was, who he was seeing. I'd wait the next bus, follow him down; I knew just where he'd gone. I *knew*. Never crashed his party: just checked where he was, who was keeping him amused. Getting off on his icy smile, his do-anything blue eyes. Just check he was happy. Then cane myself on dust and booze, where I'd never the simple cleanness of mind to slash my wrists. Pretend when I saw him it was alright. It *was*. He didn't own me. Didn't owe me the place at his feet you give dogs.

I'm dull now: calm and sober. Even jacked the copycat sixty-a-day lung-boiling. I miss it: having something to do with my lips. I joke the girls at work I'm a catch: own clothes, own teeth. Don't mix with the lads; they're all very married, middle-class gay: bollock-busting mortgages, two weeks down Vietnam, farmers market of a Sunday. Living straight, if you ask me. But that's just me. Settled in nice couples, with nice men who respect them. There's a species gap: I'm one of them dogs, don't fit; stray, no sense of direction. Not settled, not on the scene, not lonely enough to go looking. Except I'm always looking. All I wanted that bastard to do was have me.

Sick to pieces when he left. Glad there were no goodbyes, no pissy explanations. But sick. Kept thinking: day or two, a week, he'll call. Kept thinking I'd sit over the table from him, grinning and *grinning* while he swished through his latest adventure. But he was gone with some lad or other, and I began the slow business of putting young days behind me. Don't see anyone from the old times now. Don't know I'd recognise them. Crack on to the girls I've a juicy past. I *have*. Just very past. The days of tequila and easy-off trousers. Now, half of every black bag I chuck out is tissue paper. I'm a cartoon, drawn on, taking falls for laughs.

Guys like Stevie, see them around; effortless. Got the look. I've always had to work at it, work, to get noticed. Quiet, back when I should've been loud;

jumpy, when I should've been fearless. I've done so much and got so little, I don't even believe my own past. It's something made-up, to be in the gang. Cook-chill memories: reheated, synthetic, the goodness frozen away. There's a likeness from me to the guys with the look. But they're the right jacket, right jeans, right hair. I'm the rainy days of Queertown: done with flighty, but never got wise. I drift, from day to day.

Stevie would say: when people see you, they see a grey young man. Cruel, but I'm forgiving. I took it to heart, his good advice, tried taming the worst of my dog-nature. Stopped being so keen, so shrill. Stepped back from being needy. I see the party: I don't bust in. I wait invitations I don't care will never come.

I don't take chances. Like that night, when I saw this totally good-looking lad. Way taller than I'd ever pull; younger, too - twenties, I guess. Kid, really, by his shock of gassed blond hair. Trendy dressed: black jacket and skinnies. Very full of himself, and rightly. Followed him, down this clubby-looking bar with blacked-out windows. Lot a noise leaking out. Lot a laughter.

Someplace, there's a story where I went in, breezed it past the no-neck. Comfortable enough to get myself through, to stay. Found blondie alone and, of everyone, read the sadness in his smile. My honest concern alive to him, through the noise, the music. My quietness compelling him to talk to me alone. Hours later, by the river, he'd tell me all his secrets. My experience reassured him. My age was something good. Hours later, in his room, with a view that leaves the curtains wide, I'd remember what it's like when someone knows what I'm *for*. And morning would be the beginning. Somewhere, maybe here, tonight, that story's getting told. But not by me, not *with* me. I turned around and went home.

I'm a backwards narcissist: I see everything more wrong, my face more lined, my skin more saggy, my value on the slide. I'm proud of that. Proud I'm still how Stevie left me. I haven't settled for marriage, cancer, wealth, or hippy shit. Every day since he's gone drives me back to his smile. So the other night, when I saw that lad, when nothing came but a long walk home, I didn't regret it. I deserved to feel nothing. This sleepless, fumbling unhappiness is Stevie's charm against the cold, the icebergs of commitment. I play at life, litter my nights with make-believe lonely hearts I don't post in no lonely chat room. Joke what a catch I am: GSOH, likes pubs, clubs. Seeks dancing, maybe more. Maybe less. Small dog seeks trustworthy chain. Aim: location. I never planned to live beyond twenty-five, each year since torn out from the anxiety of near-misses. Never planned for days when distance would screw me more than heartbreak.

Parties I'm too old for: working drunk, disco biscuits, anything mixing poppers, strobes, floodlit bal-

conies and being sick in bags. Anything but that moment, every morning, when all I hear is my heart. The girls at work, babes and chicks, ask how to help me. Joking, I say what *not* to do: I'm special, not a freak. Alone, not lonely. On an island, oceaned by a life that cracks me up and cuts me ragged. Stevie could do inclusion. With a wave of his hands, everyone was changed into his conspirators, his consumers, wanting more of what little he gave. I used to be wary, touchy, hurt; now, I'm hard on people. I take my island landscape for the paradise I've made.

Him, he'd bridge me, chain me to what was warm, alive. The slightest touch, the vaguest smile, thrilling like a proper drug that ups and never downs you. The drug we go through the whole party bag, the laboratory, to find. For hours, bits of hours, I was happy on his leash: wagging my rump while he'd gloss the hurt, tell everyone I was *such* a dog, malice in his eyes more compelling than love. My identity was how I'd sit, and stay, and walk to heel. Without that, I've grown stray: no master, no meaning. A dog

on a dog's island, free from the continent of love. I wanted the real life, the big bone, the proper connection to land. But there's no pedigree stares from the mirror. Just the spite of not playing dead.

You shouldn't let life slip. Seize the day and all that shit. Just do it. All in my lonely hearts: spontaneous, likes surprises. Adventurous, edgy, fresh. All different words for lonely. I like regular, knowing what time for the door. Set my tail thumping at the familiar key in the lock. Get my reward when I've earned it, when I've learned to beg.

Parties I'd go to right now: none. Not till he walks back through the door and sighs like he used to do. That contempt I always thought was my way into belonging. Have the reward I never got for tricks I've barely shown. Till then, that's me in the personals, with the sad fat kids and poorly old men wistful of a ride. Wouldn't need to say much. He'd know it was me. Mark, forty, mongrel but keen. Stranded and willing to paddle. ■

06

Maria Jastrzebska Kalami

At this time of year, black
nets for catching olives
are spread like widow's crepe,
under the trees. Dry leaves
like thousands of little fishes,
crackle silver under my feet.

There are enough white pebbles
to skim the motionless water.
I find orchids in wild grass.
Wisteria petals blow
into my salad, lizards appear
as I'm about to turn away

and all over again
your death catches me out.

An Anti-War Feminist Activist Lesbian Goes on Holiday in Her ex-Homeland ex-Yugoslavia

Lepa Mladjenović

Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia, Summer 2006

from memory

In 1995 – four years into the war – anti-war activists organized the International Citizens Forum conference in Tuzla, a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina that had less shooting than other areas. Ten buses and many jeeps traveled through the war zones to reach this destination. The second day of the conference, which was an historic one, given the circumstances, there was a disco night at the hotel where all the participants were staying. Around midnight, the music stops for an instant: an alternative Bosnian theater group of three young people, playing three young people on the street, are, one by one, shot with the loud sound of snipers coming from the speakers. One dies, then the next one, and finally the third one... they lie in the center of what had just been a disco podium, and remain like that for the next minute. Then the actors get up and leave, and the music continues.

The next day there's an ongoing discussion about what happened the night before. Many foreigners from countries without war thought it was an unnecessary distraction, given that it was already the life of people in Bosnia. The young feminist activists from Bosnia said it was very good, that this was exactly what they needed: to get in touch with those who suffer. To get a dose of pain, and then continue to dance and have fun without guilt!

this summer

I am preparing to leave on vacation with my dear friend, a lesbian feminist anti-war activist, a Woman in Black from Leuven, a small town in Belgium. She drove all the way to pick me up so that we could have fun together driving through Bosnia and Herzegovina to the coast. That morning, just before we hit the road, another friend from Women in Black, from Jerusalem, calls: the situation in Israel is still tense; she sounds tired and sad. Images of destroyed Beirut come to mind. There is pain and misery in many

regions, but I'm still going on vacation. I take the T-shirt my dear friend from Israel gave me and leave.

next stop

In Sarajevo, our friend, another activist from Women in Black, introduces us to a male friend. He is 47 and has a little beard. I ask him about his beard. Soon we are walking alone and he tells me that he's hiding a scar. "Yes, I was in the war from the beginning, and I've been shot at three times, once by Serbs, the second time in Mostar by Croats, and the third time by 'mine own.'"

Our friend takes us on a trip outside the city into the green hills around Sarajevo. The scenery is wonderful. We try to picture where the Serbian snipers would have positioned themselves to kill citizens. An old Hiking Society cottage is here with wooden tables in the yard under the plum trees. We are five and we want to sit there. A middle-aged woman tells us where the best spot is. She's on her way to pick some plants, a flower that "offers" peace to the soul. "You see," she says. "I sit this way, with my back turned to Trebevic, because my younger son was killed there, on the mountain, in 1993, he was 19. I can't ever face that side of town." She shows us his photo from her old wallet.

next stop

In Mostar, my friend and I are in a small, typical post-war shop that sells a little bit of everything. It is just outside the old town, near the rebuilt old bridge, with big stones on one side and on the other side painted: "Never forget, 1993" – the year the bridge was bombed. The young woman working in the shop is scratching her back as we enter. We get what we want and she's still scratching her back, with one, then both arms crossed in front of her to reach the far places on her back. I ask how she is. "The gellers are awakening," she says. I ask her to explain; in Bosnia,

I can never tell when people are joking or just being philosophical and matter-of-fact. She says gellers are part of a sniper's bullet and they're lodged in her back, too close to her spine to operate. It is because of the change in the weather that the gellers in her back are aching.

from memory

One day in 1995 – a feminist lesbian lawyer from Leuven had driven all the way from Belgium with her car full of stuff – we were filling boxes to make packages to send to women in Sarajevo. We spent hours organizing the items. This is a box for a woman who lives on the seventh floor with no electricity or heating – she's a biologist and has an old sick father. This box is for a woman who is an actor and has a young daughter and a husband. This one is for an older woman living alone with many neighbouring friends. What should we put in which box – always taking into consideration who the box is for, who the neighbors are, where the snipers are in the town, how cold it is in the cellar, what little surprises might a woman like her want. We packed beans, dried vegetables, the best nuts, expensive chocolates, famous brands of cigarettes, coffee... carefully, with all the intelligence and patience of caring for the other that we'd acquired during our lesbian years of loving each other.*

next stop

We are in Croatia, on the beautiful Adriatic Sea, on a boat that's taking us to the island of Brac. There, on the windy deck of the boat, I meet, by coincidence, four young lesbians I remember from a workshop we held last year on the island so that lesbians from Serbia could meet lesbians from Croatia. This is what they tell me: a lesbian from Croatia is trying to build a little house on the island, on a small piece of land she got as a gift. The lesbians from Serbia hitchhiked to Croatia to help build the foundations. They were sleeping in tents, in sleeping bags, and had been working all summer long.

This is just an ordinary story from any country not at war or in poverty. It was an ordinary story in the time of my youth. But now, at this moment in the history of Europe, it is an extraordinary story. These lesbians dare to cross the border, hitch-hike, and work together. It is ten years since the war ended, but still the mistrust and hatred are everywhere. Whenever I leave for Croatia, some relative will always ask me if I am afraid. They want to know how I can trust the Croats.

When the war started in Lebanon, I thought about lesbians from Beirut and Haifa. What were our

ASWAT sisters doing now? Can a lesbian in Palestine, however she names her desire for women, survive and still love women? What are women who love women doing in Darfur or Kabul? What are the thousand ways in which our being lesbians in wartime is disguised? It hurts people in war to even mention the L word. So we are the first to bury the symbols of our lesbian souls, to close them down to the deepest inquietudes. But the image of the four lesbians from the sunshine ship on the blue Adriatic last summer is in my lightened heart. We can create conditions for lesbians to meet each other and make the trust flow between us. ■

* This paragraph was previously published in Lepa Mladjenović's "Lesbian Feminist Living in the Time of War" in *Index on Censorship* (4, 1995).

Christopher Nield

What It's Like, After All

I have discovered love;
you weren't what I expected.
Your paunch, for example,
isn't – let's be honest –
the ideal.
And yet I have found rest on it.
Just touching it,
that unfettered belly,
that soft underside
of your adamantite suit
is utter joy –
cold fluttering lightness.

I have discovered faith
in your folds, those august
fistfuls of too-muchness,
that smooth interior
all over, all over!
My caramel, sheer, irresistible Ganesha.

I have discovered lust
in your feet,
those fascinated dainty snubs at which far point your body ends
and curves up to begin
all over again.

I have discovered trust
in your technique:
ten out of ten.

I have discovered home
in your grip,
the way you fashion me
with hands, so delectably unseen,
when you allow yourself
to quicken from prim majesty
and, afterwards, on my chest
you sleep. That fat, elusive
upward flicker
of grace
at your imperious mouth
astounds me – agonises
my lank heart.

10



I Want You to Come to My House

George Aristidopoulos

June 2006, Doncaster, Melbourne

A handsome man walks down a suburban street glancing at a neatly folded piece of paper in his hand, muttering to himself. It is a cold Sunday morning. He wears a black coat. He carries a green plastic bag in his other hand. He's clearly a stranger to this neighbourhood. Is this a professional call? Is he on an errand or a chore, begrudgingly? Would it be safe to assume this is a personal call, seeing as it's a Sunday morning?

I could be wrong. How should I know? I'm not psychic.

I want you to tie my hands to the bed

February 1975, Fitzroy, Melbourne

Screams can be heard from a run-down house in a poor neighbourhood. Flies and mosquitoes spin around the front porch light. If one could trace the outline of their trails in black ink, the map would resemble the thoughts of a madman. It is a hot night. Four men fight in a brightly-lit kitchen. Above them, insects buzz against a naked light bulb. A mass of opened VB cans on the table. Crockery smashes. Chairs get kicked aside.

One man, in his fifties, yells and stamps his fists against a nicotine-stained wall. Two younger men appear to be in their early twenties; the shorter one has long black hair, the taller one's head is shaved and there's a cross dangling from his left ear.

From outside, through the open kitchen window, I watch them sweating and shouting over each other as they kick and punch a teenage boy. Though their words overlap and are difficult to decipher, one thing is for sure, they all have an Australian accent, yet all have dark Mediterranean features. Maybe Spanish? Greek? Italian? Again, I'm only guessing. I wouldn't know.

This is clearly a family feud.

The longhaired brother kicks the boy in the genitals. "No brother of mine is a fucking faggot!" He forces his young brother to drink from a bottle of Southern Comfort. "You think you can humiliate our family name? Drink, cunt! Like a real man!"

Across the street, a neighbour's front door opens

and floods the front lawn with light. A man's shadow elongates across the manicured grass, framed in a rectangle of sharp white light. He is a blonde Australian, in his early twenties. But I am only speculating. Maybe he's English. He runs into the scabrous house. "What the fuck's going on here, mate?"

The teenage brother falls to the floor, convulsing in his vomit. Blood splotted across his face like jigsaw pieces.

"Dave, mate, he's a fucking poof!" the shaved-headed brother says.

Dave's skin grows whiter before a fire blazes across his face. "Dead set, mate? Con? A poof?" He abets his neighbours by kicking the teenage boy. In the head, then the abdomen. The shaved brother urinates over the boy's face. "Con, darling," he jeers. "You've smudged your lipstick."

"Good boy, Takis!" the father says. "Kick him once more for me!" Then he snorts through his nostrils and shoots a green phlegm mass onto his son. He swallows a mouthful of beer from a crushed VB can. "Come on boys!" he slurs. "He needs to be reminded what cocks are really made for!" The father dangles a cluster of keys in the air, then throws them at the long-haired son. "Spiro! Start the car! To the Mermaid's Cave!"

June 2006, Doncaster, Melbourne

I got to his street and checked out the numbers. 104. 102. 100. All the houses looked the same. Lego land. Brown. Perfect. Two storeys. Same size. Same shape. Front lawns. Gates. Gnomes. Shiny cars in spotless driveways.

I will leave the front door open for you

I'd printed out his email. We'd been corresponding all week. I'd memorised his specific demands, his instructions. I'm sure he'd played out this fantasy many times before.

It was only three weeks ago when I'd bumped into him by chance. I was at the hot dog stand and he was sitting on the steps of the hospital nearby, chain

smoking. I didn't recognise him until he called my name. He still had those dirty eyes that made me swell so much that my briefs suddenly felt ten sizes too small. He said he was waiting for his wife. She'd taken their kid in to see a doctor. He insisted we exchange emails. He said his wife would be staying with the in-laws soon. We could have a drink or something. I put his card in my pocket. He listed me in his mobile.

I looked up at the blue sky as I got closer. *Jesus loves everybody*. The sun hung diagonally above all the houses. I looked down at the email and checked his address. I wasn't far off. About five minutes away. Number 42. Charlotte Street. *Jesus loves me*.

Creep up the stairs to my bedroom

48. 6. 4. Here it is. 42. Something's not right. The front door looks locked. I open the gate and walk up the concrete path. Green bushes, daisies, roses on either side. I touch the shiny fake wood. The front door creaks open. Yes! I peek inside. A large clean room. Very ordered. Wooden floors. Rugs. Photos on the wall. A green vinyl settee-cushions. I step inside and close the door. I take off my coat. I creep lightly across the room but the floorboards give me away. Shit! I put my coat on the chair by a table. My plastic bag securely against a wall. I strip naked while avoiding the accusing family photos.

I will pretend to be asleep

morning hon,
on second thoughts, i decided to change that brown top after all. i've gone into town with the kids, also to get a little pressie for gran. there's some left overs in the fridge if you're hungry.

see you shortly babe,
luv ya hon

XXX nat

PS: Please don't forget about the leaves!!! ;-) XXXXXXXX

February 1975, Fitzroy, Melbourne

They pulled me into a dark room with her that bitch into a dim room glowing red inside dark and stunk nasty disinfectant shit piss dirt in the corner a single bed in the corner they stripped me I saw screams come to life turn into people screaming people flying around me my neck muscles tightened I couldn't speak and you God you God you were there laughing my son my son be a son a boy a man you are a man not a woman then Dave then my brothers held me down kicked me again before leaving giving orders to the bitch she dragged me across the dark room her sharp heels her quick steps like nails tap bang banging into the floor like a machine gun her quick steps

shot jabbed me my heart bled red thick ugly red lipstick ring round her skinny mouth and the blue and black streaks seeped into lines around her eyes her cunt stank before she even forced my head to eat it lick it is what Spiro and Dave said to her what to do what I should do what she would do to me it was an order he'd smash her face up too he said if she didn't on the bed the edge collapsed I fell off onto the dirty sticky floor and their laughing I could hear outside I want to die oh mama please help me mama.

Say nothing

June 2006, Doncaster, Melbourne

Watching from outside through a hole in the curtain, I can see the handsome man getting under the white duvet in the upstairs bedroom.

No condoms

There's another man, blonde, lying face down on the bed. He appears to be asleep, his hands on either side of his head. Soft fluffy toys sleep in a baby's cot in a corner of the room. Women's clothes hang on two coat hangers off the top of a wardrobe door. Rope seems to be tied to the headboard. Yes, it is rope. The handsome one ties it around the wrists of the sleeping blonde man. The handsome one mounts the sleeping man. They are both under the covers. A slow upward and downward movement of the duvet. The repetitive pace quickens – what started off as a gentle action is now becoming, well, violent. The sleeping man is screaming, yet his voice trembles with the sweet tone of acquiescence.

I cannot hear his words exactly from outside. Downstairs, a mobile phone rings. The handsome man springs up onto his knees as the duvet cover falls to the floor. Blood smears the white sheets and runs down the blonde man's thighs. The handsome one gets off the bed and stands. The mobile stops ringing. He looks down at the bleeding man who is now weeping for him to continue. His urgent, simple words I can hear clearly now.

"Harder. I want your seed inside me. Fuck my hole. Fuck me. I want your Greek baby".

The handsome man unties his wrists and leaves the room.

Nothing

I count back the years as I plough in and out of his cunt. 2004. 2003. 1998. It was no secret back then. No secret dad was fucking Sofia. 97. 96. 75. In 1975. I remember that morning at breakfast. Mama was moving between the sink, the stove, the kitchen table, cooking, serving, washing up then serving some more, filling coffee cups, buttering toast, being the

typical obsessive, possessive Greek mum, impervious to Dad's behaviour, meekly subscribing to her role as the perfect housewife, wilfully allowing dad's shadow to devour her.

He staggered into the kitchen that morning, sat down, grinned at us, then flung out Sofia's damp panties from his pocket, dropping them into the centre of the table, confirming his pathetic manhood.

After giving birth to us, we, her sons, became the great loves in my mum's life, and she embraced motherhood with such passion, focused all her love on us, to the point where she'd abandoned all notions of herself as an individual. Dad treated her as nothing more than his cleaner, his cook. A womb to dump his seed in. Breed sons. Keep his fucking name alive.

But where was she now? Mad. Cruelly expunged from the things she loved.

hey nat honey,

I just popped out early to buy a plant from the local nursery. Joe said he saw a whole lot of herbs there last week. You mentioned wanting some herbs. Basil, rosemary, and camomile. Will see what I can find.

Don't worry I raked away all the leaves this morning and watered the garden, especially your daisies. Did all the dishes too.

Hope everything went ok and they let you change that brown top. And yes, I agree, it was too tight. (NO! you are NOT fat!!!)

After the nursery I'll pop into Sunday mass. I'll leave at 12.30 so if you need anything extra, leave a message as I'll switch my mobile off once I'm in church.

I'll be home by 1 for lunch. Tell the kids if they wash Ringo we can carry him to Gran's in the picnic basket this arvo. ;-)

love ya honey bunny

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Con

I've fucked up! She called! I told her I wouldn't be free till 12.30. FuckFuckFuck! How could I forget to turn it off! What's my excuse? Her name registered on the screen. Fuck! Maybe I could say I lost it? I lost it on my way to church or something. I could say I got mugged. I'll throw this one away! I'll get rid of it! What else can I do? Tell her I'm fucking Dave?

When I got downstairs at his house, I raced to the bathroom to wash off the mess and noticed an old photo above the loo: Dave arm in arm with my brothers after a footy match.

The handsome man hurries down the street. He wears a black coat and mumbles to himself. He carries a green plastic bag in his left hand, the leaves of a basil plant peep out from the top. He is a stranger to this neighbourhood. He turns his head back, then

forwards again. He checks his mobile then quickens his pace. It is almost noon on a cold Sunday morning. I know this because the sun hangs directly above. Where is this man heading to now? His fast steps suggest an urgency. It's hard to say what he's thinking. I am astute. But I'm just an observer. How would I know?

Jesus loves everybody. ■

Lynn Foote Mandraki

Eastwards lies the beach of my youth,
but actually the boat is cut in two
and the front is not perfect nor symmetrical.

The cliff-top cemetery looks out hundreds
of feet onto the blue Med. If I took
a spade, say, to lay a water main
or dig a ditch, this is how it would look –
the squared oblong you lay a body in.
Really, it is all rubble and turned soil.

Here I am at the centre of the *oukimene*
where the four corners of the world are pulled
into a white sheet in my hands, crumpled
like a bag. My parents dead, myself –
on some unimaginable shelf of being.

14

Jenny Thompson Somewhere Other than the Sea

Plankton watching from a yawn of light,
all noise mute like whale talk –
two thighs are almost touching.

And we are something other
than tiny fish. Two stomachs half
above cover – the stitch of our pulse.

It is dusk and the room is like chalk,
its line undefined by slight stretches
warming unwashed sheets.

We run our fingers over skin
almost grained with cold, stroke
Indian tassels, trace incense shapes.

Three days sleepless, our stillness
deftly anchored from a mattress
on the floor. Sharing cigarettes,

we kiss sometimes, watching strands
of tobacco fall upon flesh
like symbols of a nothing language.

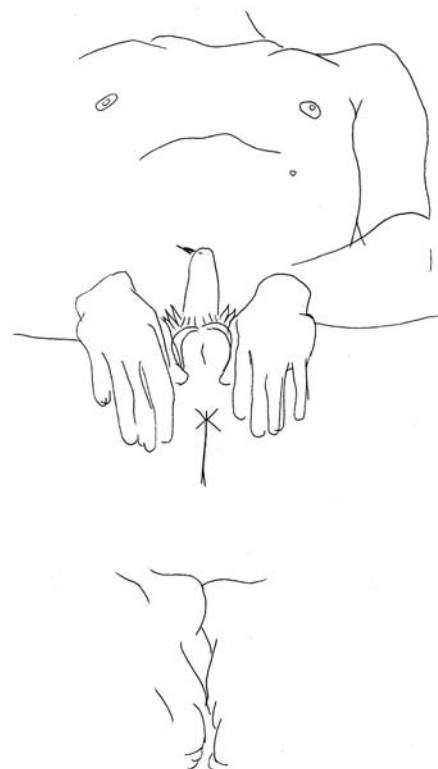
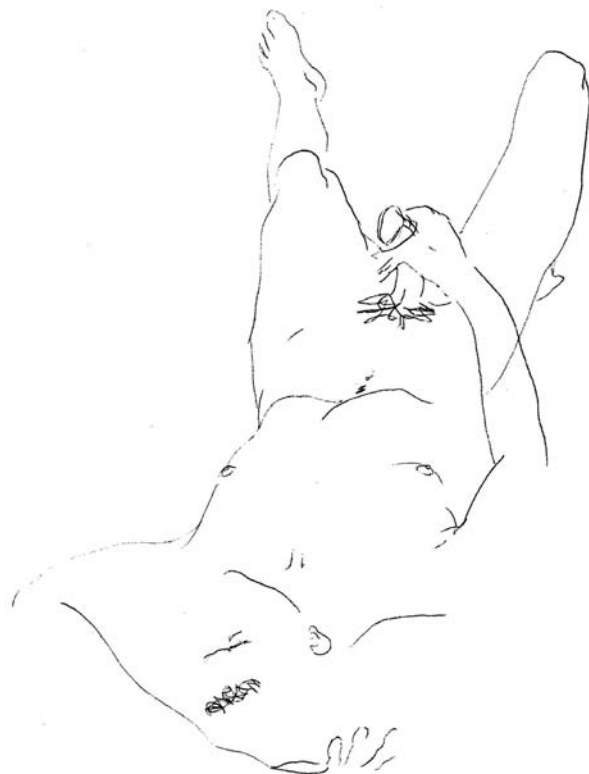


15

Brian Cronwall

Bare Backing

Some evening or afternoon or night,
in a maze room or candlelit bedroom,
some moment of tongue
on five-o'clock-shadow and sweat
or clutches of purple moans and smiles,
you'll probably do it: in spite of what you know,
have read, heard, told the educator or your therapist,
though you have a Trojan under the key band
or in the laquered box on the nightstand,
despite your pledges of "risk management"
and "harm reduction," you'll do it.
He'll be amazing, or look negative, so
you'll just what-the-hell with him anyway.
It's just one time. His touch is fire and lava,
juicing peach and salty beer, tobacco
breath after decades of only dreaming of smoking,
sea-mist as smooth as moss, his and your fingers
traveling continent to island to sea,
caught in kelp-beds wrapped around limbs,
his dark focused eyes and yours wetly watching:
you will forget to remember and remember to forget
alternatives as you slowly ripen into each other's
pistils and stamens, buzzing crescendo swarms,
closer then closer to that eager moment when
you will yes-by god-do it, the moment before
the worrying begins all over again.



Alan C. Smith

London Drizzle

you always swept the sky clean
I recall the pristine night
hours in your professional care
those expensive freebies
I always welcomed
the accursed tropical drizzle
with you drenched slick shining
lightly oiled and rain scented
beneath your broad turtle smile
gone the days when I would run
shrinking cower in shaded corners
and under awnings that frantic
feline way even in the London air
instead grab you by the handles
and fly all the way to Brixton
and back with my eyes closed
and my breath caught in a place
just out of reach of my chest
when we island boys
cannot see and smell the sea
we fly away don't we

17



18



Revolution

Michael Sutherland

It was the weather, it was fog, it was humidity, it was lightening and tornadoes ripping through housing estates. It was terrorists and it was mad scientists. It was Porton Down and Rendlesham Forest and all that creepy UFO stuff going on down there. It was Montauk and Orford Ness. It was Watson-Watt, Tesla and Death Rays. It was *When Worlds Collide*. It was Velikovsky and *Worlds in Collision*. It was Nostradamus and Satan had finally arrived. It was greed. It was poverty. It was Gaia fighting back. It was the night and it had something to do with the days, too. It was endless pure bloody murder and grief and everything switched off.

It was the middle of summer and the night sky at its clearest when the lights went out. Streetlights wavered and flickered a few times before blinking off completely. House lights were next, then fridges and freezers, then televisions. Plasma screens whimpered, and faces screamed into meltdown, into thin white dukes from nowhere, and lines became monsters transformed into things of the night bringing darkness that stayed.

Mobiles transformed into backyards of junk, and landlines dying sealed the fate of communication – everyone lost power, no medium, no talk. They were lost. We were all lost in a sea of pitch and silence.

Amalgams melted, fillings dropped out and evaporated. Braces buckled and buckles rusted as wheels burst and eyes of glass shattered in orbit. Struck numb and dumb we stood around eyeless marionettes, an endless, thoughtless mass of wireless puppets. Nowhere to go, nuhin uh do.

Computers and Internet faded like old radio shows, nothing but static coming and going, sounds sinking, screens dying, then all off. Cars and buses and trains and planes, anything with an engine in it, ground to a halt and was left where it was. Lifts jammed and dumbwaiters stayed dumb and kept their traps shut *en masse*.

It was the homos what done it, and them there drag queens, and the whites and the blacks and the liberals and libertines. It was the breeders and men and women and children for daring to breathe. It was

a genetically modified conspiracy. It was bird flu and measles and mumps and rubella. There was too much of everything and not enough of anything. Whatever it was, it was always someone else's fault, for someone else to fix, and fix it quick or I swear to God I'll... I'll... But a bullet in the head stopped her and no one blinked or gasped and they all drifted away in rags from riches into a fertile stew of plutonic lethality.

Dialysis machines were hand-cranked until nurses' arms grew too tired and their patients died before their eyes. Then relatives and friends beat nurses and doctors to a pulp with threats and crankshafts for not trying damn well hard enough. Ventilators ceased to function and doctors and nurses struggled to force air into lungs too sick to breathe, until, through tears and exhaustion, fear and loathing and knives and guns at their heads, they all stopped. Everything stopped. Dead.

We watched a sea of souls rising each year, but we all turned away and didn't do a damn thing to stop it, even when its rot wafted us cool in purulent waves. The signs had been quickening quicker than before. Eddy's mother one more domino in a long line of dolls, a yo-yo of sine waves strung out on statins and Moclobemide. Another pill, another push over the edge, and another to yank her back on a chair-o-plane ride. Losing faith in instinct, she became a monster, an NHS junkie imploding on suicidal impact, or was it medicalized murder? Who can tell when a victim's victory is to torture loved ones with taunts of her own demise? She won and she lost on measure for measure, equal on none, leaving a motherless child.

My son, my life, it was never easy to be a hawk in a dove. I watched over my child, and I looked on a world hungrier for highs ever higher than before.

We aimed for the coast, sea breeze and ozone. I don't know why. Safer in the thought that life had crawled onto the edge on such shores, who knows? And with us enough oil, lard and wax to keep things alight.

Eddy saw the cave first, high up on the cliff, so high I thought he had lost it being in the dark for so long. With the last of the batteries in the night-vision

lenses, I saw it too. High enough to feel safe from immediate danger, but high enough to kill us climbing up there.

Eddy took over. I was exhausted. I crashed down on cold and damp rocks. Eddy tied together old rags and scrub-grass and dipped it in oil. The cave glowed. We looked at each other. I had no idea if my face was as grubby as his. We laughed, so I guess it was. I felt safer in that I could sleep, and he held onto my back, each feeding the other warmth. Just don't let me walk in my sleep.

"Eddy?"

I bolted up, rocks punching my back.

The light was gone.

I pushed myself to my feet, stumbling on rubble.

"Eddy!"

A light flared.

"Jesus, Eddy, don't do that!"

"What's wrong?" he asked walking past, nonchalant.

The nightmare was wrong. The dark and the danger were wrong. Everything was wrong. Didn't he know? He looked away from me, holding a chalice of fire.

"Why didn't you answer?" I asked.

"You didn't give me a chance."

He crouched down, laying rocks in a circle, dumping twigs in a pile.

"You went down there?" I pointed at the opening, the maw of the cave.

"Yes," he beamed.

He pulled eggs out of a bundle of rags like it was a peace offering.

"I found these," he said.

I lurched. He jumped.

"I thought you would be pleased, Dad."

I grabbed his shoulders. The egg dropped and smashed.

"Don't ever do anything without telling me. You could have been killed."

He pulled away from me and sat down at the back of the cave, face hiding in his arms.

"Eddy, don't..."

"I can look after myself," he blurted.

"What would happen if you never came back?"

But the innocence of youth was fermenting into adolescent brew.

"You're the only thing I have, Eddy. The only thing that matters."

I sat beside him, pulled him close. He tried pulling away, but gave up after a while.

"I just wanted to..."

"To show your old man that he's too old and you're growing up too fast."

I said sorry. We made a pact. Never go it alone. He showed me where he'd found the eggs. I nearly died seeing how far up it was. But I didn't say anything, except maybe let's find things a little closer to the ground.

It's been two months now. At least we think it's been that long. We have no way of telling since every time machine has stopped and rusted on wrists and walls and even plastic has evaporated into the ether. There is no sun. No stars or moon. Nothing moves through the celestial gloom. Nothing to measure time by but instinct.

As civilised as we like to think we are, people have reneged on their humanity, and sentience has become a sweet and sour fuck-all thing, a no sweat, no worries, fear-in. Soon enough everyone has turned into a savage just to survive. No longer is money enough to buy. You got it, whatever it is, I need it. End of story.

Murder, mayhem, old grudges and new, have bubbled like lava over the lip of a nuclear reactor. No Lawmen no more. No control and no nothing to bash sense into knuckled-heads using rules and regulations and polite soft-spoken language that means nothing in the need to survive – fuck that! The whole country has shutdown. The borders, the coastline, have turned into no-goes, lucky for Eddy and me, and there is nothing but endless sea all around fading into black anyway. No big birds with Rolls Royce engines have ever returned. No boats, no ferries, no cruise liners either.

A few brave souls in junkets took their chances and left on that glass-smooth Styx. But no one came back. No great expectations were deluded.

The temperature fell, darkness stayed, plants died, animals starved.

Allotments were raided, their owners mugged, stabbed or just plain shot.

Groups came together and nodded in agreement, and looked for soothsayers to tell their worried heads what they wanted to hear. Then they fought amongst themselves. War broke out all over the place, and people and pets were flattened or firebombed or both, in revenge. And if a pet was still standing, well, that was hamburger stew.

We escaped the city. But the countryside had become a swamp of the mad, bad and downright dangerous. Desperate monsters had escaped from cages whose walls fell in a crumble of dust. Bedlam threw up every madman from hell.

The sick and the dying were left to get sicker and die. And thank God, some said, and thank God again, because the suffering was over on both sides of the seesaw at that.

No pills, no potions, and insulin and heparin dried up, too. Ain't no nuhin no use, cause needles are blunted and buckled and rusted anyway, man.

Pounds of flesh broke out in spontaneous combustion, and funeral pyres rose higher until their smoky entrails sailed over rooftops sinking and crumpling down. Slate slipped and sliced through the air, through the stink of it all, and bugs and bats, and cats and rats died in a Hell's kitchen genocide.

Weeping stopped and depressing acquiescence in rivers of putrescence swilled around ankle deep. Parents killed their children and children their parents, everyone blaming everyone else for the situation, the happening, the whatever you liked to call it. New-borns became victims for taking up too much effort and air, and the adolescent hacked his parents to death for having the sheer downright arrogance to have him born into this, this fucking shit – their fault, man, their fucking generation caused this. And for that they had to die.

The government helicoptered itself into the black oblivion above and vanished. *What* a surprise.

We were on the run from an enemy we didn't know. We took to underground dwellings, tunnels and caves, whatever there was to feel safe in. Then after a while we'd move along. We lugged around rucksacks, our survival on our backs. We tried to be smart, we tried very hard. But he was only twelve and I was scared shitless for him. What happens if I'm not here? And I'd think of the difference between muscle and axe, of a big heavy blade whacking down as I tried to defend my son, unable to hold him, to shield him, to hide him from the madness.

"Will things ever get back the way they were, Dad?"

Eddy was following me along the beach, me the old man poking a stick into the sand, looking for what? Turtles' eggs? Here?

"I don't know, Eddy."

"Okay," he said, walking past me, not looking back.

"Just, okay?"

"Uh huh," he sighed. "Just, okay."

"Don't you miss things?"

"Mmm... sort of."

Pandora, do not be with me here on this one, I thought, but I flicked the latch on the lid before I knew what I was doing.

"Like?"

"School."

"School?"

He looked at me. "I miss Mondays. I miss knowing it's Friday. I miss weekends. I miss time. I miss Johnny and Jimmy..." his voice began to crack.

He slumped down on his rear on the sand. I could tell he was crying. "I miss mornings and night times, Dad."

I was a powerless failure for my own child and all I could do was sit on the sand beside him. Nothing was happening. Nothing changing, forever black.

"I was thinking," I said. "Maybe we could go back."

He looked at me then. "Where?"

"The city. Maybe we could find your friends, Jimmy, Johnny, and maybe I could find some of mine, too."

He looked away from me. "They're dead."

"You don't know that, Eddy."

"They're *all* dead."

And Santa claws too.

Fat and thin men sat around the table, collars open, ties loose, and jackets long abandoned were hanging weary on the backs of chairs.

"Will someone answer me?"

"We don't know, is the answer." The man rubbed his fat neck.

"A whole *country* can *not* just disappear! Now tell me again. Where the hell is it?"

An embarrassed hush fell over bowed heads and shifting eyes that looked everywhere, anywhere, at everyone else – avoid the eyes. Don't look at the eyes.

"Will someone answer me!"

"That is the answer," one brave soul said, leaning on the sacred table. "There is Atlantic, there is North Sea, there is English Channel, but no England."

"Or Scotland or Wales," piped in a man with a thin face and an Armani suit.

"Ireland?"

"Oh, it's still there. North and South. And the Orkneys and Shetlands. So far anyway."

"And Europe?"

"Still there."

"Paris, France?"

"It's there, too."

"Just my luck."

"Everything's been diverted, flights, boats, freight."

"But no England, my England," said another with a singsong lilt.

"The Emerald Isle?"

"That's Ireland, sir."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. I knew *that*."

"No England, no Sceptred Isle, no Great Britain, nothing is there."

A Landsat image flashed up on the screen. "This is the last we have of it, before and after."

"Terrorists?"

Is this dumb fuck taking *any* of this in?

And everyone turned to look at the guy who had said such a stupid thing and how he looked so little now.

"Sir, the whole country has vanished," someone offered, with a look on one side of his face like barbed wire had been dragged up it.

One said it, the others wished they had.

"Find me someone to blame for this. I can *not* go to the country, on television, address the nation and say, I dunno, whahappined? So give me something. Anything."

First image from space – country basking in sunshine. Next image – cloud cover. Last image – sea and a great big fucking gap.

"Did it sink? What about Menwith Hill? Fylingdales? Are they gone too?"

"Well, we did try telephoning a few folks, but..."

"Yes?"

"Unobtainable."

"Ten Downing Street?"

"No one's home, sir."

"What about that other one, whatshername, the Queen?"

"Mrs Windsor doesn't seem to be answering calls either."

"Damn terrorists."

Everyone gave everyone else an uncomfortable look and shifted those uncomfortable looks back at the guy with his fists clenched on the table. Then they did something more useful and shuffled around in tiny little steps, like they had horned toads under their feet.

The door burst wide. A young bespectacled man rushed in and stopped in a skid on the eagle's head.

The man who thought he was in charge of the planet, now minus one little bit, his fists still clenched on air, stood up, and leaned on the big-wig's all-important table.

"What?"

Sweat ran down the young man's face. He could have been straight from the pages of *Vogue*. "Sir?"

"Yes. What is it, son?" the little man who used to be a big man said, drawing the sweat off his face with a twitching hand.

"There's cloud cover piling up over France."

"And?"

"And," someone drawled, followed by a whistle, "Same thing happened to Great Britain before *it* vanished."

Every parent has his child's life mapped out from the day he is born, and this part wasn't what I had planned for Eddy. It was all wrong. Would there only be dark and night for him? Would he always be on the run?

I was thirty-eight and I didn't expect to die too soon. But they were there all right, those doubts, those agonising scenarios, those nightmares even when I was awake, and they wouldn't go away.

"Dad," he said. "I think it's your birthday."

Maybe it was, maybe it didn't matter. But I sunk inside another day in another year, and if he was right, I'd forgotten about my own son's birthday two weeks before.

He had his hands behind his back. "Close your eyes," he said.

I wanted to be blind.

"Okay, you can open them now."

And out of the darkness he held a pillow of moss woven with reeds. How long had he thought about it? How long had it taken him to make it when I wasn't looking? How long had he thought of my comfort?

He smiled at me, happy to be giving.

I couldn't help it.

I cried.

"What?"

"Europe's gone. Canada too, but no big deal on that, right?"

No one laughed in the shuffle out the door.

"South America going I can about stand, but *Russia?*"

"Sir, there's nothing else but us, now."

"Damn!"

"There's nothing but us and ocean all around," the man said, picking up his jacket, running sweating arms into the silk-lined sleeves. A wall behind split and cracked open and spewed out gunk. He never flinched even as the sleeve he was shoving his arm through fell off.

I felt it on my shoulder. I had been dreaming of sea and sand and sun, of a place I'd never been. The waves lapped at the shore's edge, enticing me, drawing me nearer, come with me, sleep with me, drown with me, but something else was pulling me away, dragging me back.

"Dad, Dad!"

The darkness swamped in on me and tarred pitch over my dream. I rubbed the heels of my hands into my eyes. What *is* that heat, what *is* that humidity, what now? Eddy's voice, still a whisper, had an edge, an urgency. He crouched, his hand pushing and pulling my shoulder.

"What is it?" I said.

"Look, Dad."

But the first thing that came to me was the stink. Of wet walls of rock, of old sweat and bodies not washed in days, of clothes unclean, unchanged and threadbare, falling apart like everything else. Like the rucksacks, the billycans, the boots on our feet, like me.

"Over there, Dad. *Look!*"

It came to me then. Even in the short space of needed sleep, I had abandoned him. What if I had never woken up? What then? My head snapped to the left and looked out of the mouth of the cave we'd called home for the past week. Blood, I thought. Blood and bleeding. A thin slash across the sky at its lowest point, crimson stretching so thin and so long I had to hunker closer to the opening to take it all in.

"What is it, Dad?"

Like the old days – Why is grass green, Dad? Why is the sky blue? I knew why the sky was blue and the grass green. I knew about physics and biology, about chlorophyll and wavelengths measured in nanometers. I knew about ariel-complexes and how plants accelerate electrons until they are just right. I knew that grass isn't really green but red, because green is the wavelength of light grass kicks out, rejects, no use. I knew all the complicated answers. I never had any simple ones.

The slash widened slowly into a gap.

"The horizon?" I said.

The gap widened more, the red fading into vermillion, then into a widening deep ochre bleeding into soft fuzzy peach.

"The sun," I said, though I didn't believe it even as I saw it.

And we sat there watching the glow stretching over, warming and casting shadows with light. The cities were gone, nothing to see, nothing down there, no structures, no anything. We'd already witnessed how every man-made structure had ground into dust. Steel, glass, and fancy wrought-iron work had blistered and peeled and rusted, and roads had bubbled up and churned into mulch wherever we went. There had been nothing for weeks, nothing to look for, nothing to head for, no sanctuary to seek.

And now, as we looked out and down from our alto plano, down onto the first dawn in months, there was nothing to be seen of man, his life, his work, his meaning, his history. Everything had been erased, reworked and woven into the fabric of a New World.

There was so much green out there. A never ending sea of green, of tree ferns and vines reaching up to the light rolling in from the horizon. And the air was heavy and warm and dense with humidity. The beginning of clouds rose up in a filigreed mist, so pure, so soft, so real.

It had been a long time since I'd looked at those drawings as a child, those paintings, representations by another hand, another mind, another fevered imagination. But the memory came back to me now. Only I wasn't looking at paintings and drawings, at someone's imagination. I was seeing them in the flesh. Sigillarias, Lepidodendrons, Medullosas, and Calamites and gigantic club mosses, and I knew there would be insects and dragonflies with two-foot wingspans. Then it came to me. Laurentia, Gondwana, Baltica, the Panthalassic Ocean.

"What's happened, Dad?" Eddy asked, legs dangling over the edge of the cliff.

"Pangea," I whispered.

It wasn't an answer, more a feeling than a knowing. As if everything had reversed on itself, and time and tide, and man and men but for us had vanished.

We must be in the Southern Hemisphere now. No wonder it was so damn warm and humid and the air so dense. So thick it was pushed in faster than I could breathe it back out. But there was light and there was green, there was a musky scent to the heavy air.

"Look, Dad," Eddy said with genuine excitement, innocence, raising his arm, pointing a finger down into the distance. For a moment he was lost in the wonder of it all. Perhaps we were the only humans here. "Look at it, Dad."

And so I did. A *Meganeura*, a gigantic dragonfly ascending from a canopy of giant tree ferns. The insect hovered in front of us, its body a glittering metallic blue, a deep blue in the hazy orange sunlight still low on the horizon. It must be true, it must be. Dragonflies with wingspans this big wouldn't be capable of flying in air too thin. There was only one time when the atmosphere was hyperdense enough to support them, and I breathed it deeply.

This is where the trouble started, I thought, as we sat there, legs over the edge, looking at that beautiful creature with curiosity in its glinting black eyes, its wings beating in a golden blur.

We where in a place and time where all the energy for a future earth would become stored and fossilised for another species to emerge and exploit, to ruin the air, to release the energy too fast in too short a time, to choke the planet. But that would be a long time from now – three hundred and fifty million years away. For now we were in a time when the northern ice cap hadn't even begun to freeze over, and the sea level was high, higher than it would ever be again

The storm clouds gathered over Washington. The blackness came and stayed and the lights went out. And no amount of F-111s can shoot down clouds. They tried busting holes in them with tons of silver nitrate. But the V2 bombers that took it up there never came back, and the clouds stayed anyway. And now the White House began to sink and bury itself into the earth giving way beneath it, as a President sat at a table as the walls came tumbling down.

"Damn terrorists," he muttered.

The glass of the windows, six inches thick, exploded inward as the foundations melted away. The candle on the table wavered, its glow dying, and lumps of rust fell from its holder like an over-stuffed, over-cooked, dead fat turkey. The rioting had stopped. The screaming had died away. The wailing and whimpering and prayers and church spires had crumpled in on themselves like wet hymn sheets. It was the last day the earth stood still, and Dear Mister President waited for the final convulsion. There was no enemy to fight, no reason for being, nothing to push against to give meaning to existence. There was nowhere to run and no point in being alive without an enemy to kill. He looked up, higher, higher. "In this island we trust...", standing up slowly, saluting, as the floorboards buckled and snapped beneath him.

I worried about predators and disease, new microbes and gigantic carnivorous worms. But so far nothing had happened. We'd climbed and slithered down vines onto the ground below. Most of it was swamp with a sweet smell I'd never known before. Mostly decaying vegetation, and new growth, a lot of new growth. So much growth we could hear the fronds unfurling during the night and open up for the blessing of a new dawn. And we stepped carefully, very careful not to trample on anything with legs enough to run, or smooth muscle to slither, circular jaws to bite with.

In the end we managed to yank some peculiar looking fish out of the water. But it seemed to take a lot more effort than the energy we gained from eating

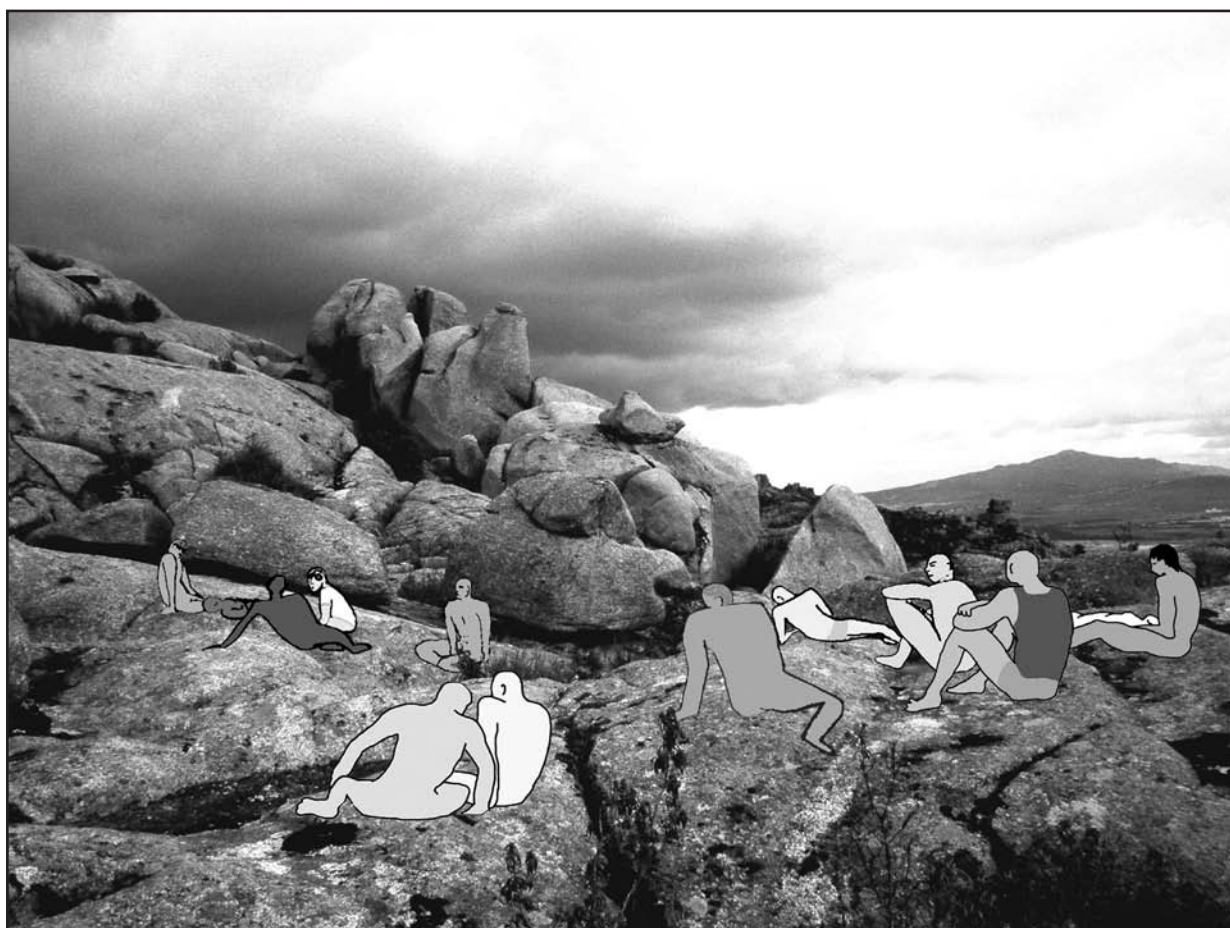
it. But there was soul food, too, and that can go a long way when there's none other for a while. And soul food was Eddy laughing at dumb Dad's dumb efforts at trying to catch dinner. Okay, so he was better than I was, I'll give way to that, but only sometimes.

Eddy thrived. He didn't complain. Maybe he was growing up too fast too young and learning not to. I just grew leaner. Insects flying, crawling or scurrying were more afraid of us than we of them. And yes, we made meals of some of them. The trouble with fire around here is that everything is so damn damp, sodden. Besides, I'd not seen any flint to make a spark with anyway. So in the end, most of the stuff we consumed was raw. Thank God I still had my own teeth.

We slept when it was dark and we woke with each sun-up. After a night sleeping inside the crowns of giant tree ferns, we'd walk a bit more, a bit further and listen out for the sounds, of voices, other voices. But that scared me and had me hang onto hope at the same time. I didn't want to be the one who would die and leave Eddy on his own, the only boy on planet earth.

We slipped and slid and walked along, and tied some loose vines around what was left of our boots. I don't suppose we smelled too sweet either, but that all blended in well enough with our surroundings. We'd laugh sometimes and talk sometimes and I began to worry about hangovers from a time no longer with us, of birthdays and Christmases, and Halloween and stuff like that. But the real unspoken conversations were the ones in my head, the talk of survival and hope. And I would sometimes look back at the mud we had just walked through, seeing it glint in the light of another dusk, and wonder if the footprints we'd made would find themselves preserved in fossilised rock. But that was just a thought, an impossible thought, a thought like any other. ■

24



Eternal Sunshine

Theresa Heath

Someone had been smoking in the toilets. It just about finished them off, actually – obliterated any last mitigating factors that may have redeemed them slightly; saved them from being a place of such hideous, failed and ill-judged interior design. More like the absence of design, really. Anti-decorating. This whole building.

It's the kind of place depressives go to die. Green-grey, stale, smell of school dinners and mouldy gym mats, peeling paint leaping from the walls in suicide strips. Air of the Victorian sanatorium it once was but with a bad eighties feel. Empty water coolers.

And the toilets – nicotine-coloured and now nicotine-stinking (although I can't blame the perpetrator – this whole place makes you want to light up or give up). More exhausted, sepia-hued paint, dish-water-scum-coloured tiles, cubicle doors in abandoned shades of school-desk brown, cheap wood and frosted glass that makes me want to press my cheek against the pane, hands splayed either side, face contorted in a rictus of horror.

This is where beauty and irony die in equal measures.

And, on the wall above the chipped enamel sink with the permanent piss-yellow streak, a few inches above the filth-encrusted drain – an admonition, rather than a request: RESPECT FELLOW PATIENTS – NO SMOKING IN THE TOILETS.

My mother is from an island nation. Tiny, arid, bleached, the summer landscape like bones, Malta is 316km² of rock in the middle of the Mediterranean. It is 93km south of Sicily, 288km north east of Tunisia; a strategic stepping stone between Mediterranean Europe and North Africa. The Maltese were invaded by just about every major colonising force, although they drew the line at Hitler.

Like people anywhere, the Maltese are a hybrid. Staunchly Catholic with Mediterranean sensibilities, they express themselves through a strange, Semitic language similar to Arabic, yet transcribed in Roman characters. Swarthy and pathologically hospitable, they are the inheritors of a strong Middle-Eastern

influence that manifests itself as a hard razor-edge, and a chronic compulsion to feed. And yet the Maltese are more of themselves than any other race I can think of. The ever-visible edge of the country is a permanent, unflagging reminder of isolation: "home" stops very abruptly, and after the border, there's nowhere else to go.

I take after my mother, but my father is English and, having no-one with whom to practice the strange concoction that is Malti, my mother never taught us much. When I visit, I become overwhelmingly frustrated that I can't chatter away in my mother's mother tongue. There is an opaque wall through which I can recognise familiar shapes and shadows, but can't quite touch them – a potent dream that leaves behind the emotions, but not the detail.

It appeals to me; the theatrical emphasis, prolonged vowels, flights of inflection, the dramatic crescendos. I have the strange feeling that it's just there, on the tip of my tongue; that it might be the perfect tool to convey a personality at home in a culture where deciding on the TV channel sounds like the apocalypse – but jars with more reserved, British sensibilities.

In conclusion, I have ended up with the histrionic Maltese temperament but only apologetic and self-deprecating English balls to back it up.

Why is it that mental health wards in hospitals make you want to kill yourself? I felt fine before I got here. Now I feel about ready to reach for the pills, curl up in a ball, and end it. I feel branded. How do these harsh East-End secretaries see me? Am I The Mentally Ill?

As usual, my psychiatrist finds me furiously scribbling. As usual, this small sophisticated Italian woman looks devastatingly stylish and utterly incongruous. As I follow her into her temporary office, I feel overlarge, lumpen and deeply unattractive. Rather than rehash our previous meetings, I talk about the girl, the lover, the one this is all about. There's really no point doing the childhood stuff anymore – I'm only seeing this psychiatrist until my psy-

chotherapy appointment comes through, but after a year of waiting, I'm not hopeful. I've lost sight of my goals, and the golden grail of Getting Better has been exchanged for Waiting for an Appointment.

So I tell her about the girl, and of how issues seem to supersede and absorb minds and bodies, and how a problem shared actually seems to be one multiplied like bacteria. I tell her the good things, too, of course, but by then they've been tarnished with negativity.

Later, the girl, the lover, the one this is all about, calls me up from work drinks, drunk, of course, and tells me she's been thinking about our relationship – again – and how she's worried that we're not in love, that we just need each other, have become obsessed and dependent on one another. Then, after my nerves have been strained like an over-taut violin bow, she relays how, in conclusion, and after hours of deep reflection with her colleagues, she has decided that in actual fact we *are* passionately in love, after all.

Funny how that makes me want to tear my hair out.

I know that I am passionately in love with her. True, I worry about everything else: Where are my keys? Is the winter affecting my mental health? Did I leave the iron on? Has Joe paid the council tax? Why won't Thogdin clean his hair out of the bath? and so on – but I know that I am passionately in love with her. In that, at least, I am secure.

* * *

But back to the Mother, archetypal and omnipresent; the grand, anglophile matriarch, shivering away in England – which she loves – yet hating hating the weather (incidentally, my mother has a flawless English accent, except when she's shouting at me or saying 'spaghetti').

She disliked the parochial intensity of Malta. Strange, then, that she should end up in Cornwall, tiny remote county at the arse-end of England, yet still bigger than the country of her birth. I ended up there by default at the age of four until I escaped at nineteen, nomadic and terminally bored. Now it's just another place to call home without knowing what that means.

I am not going to wax lyrical about the bond between mothers and daughters. That has been done to death by millions better than me. Just a little bit, then, a small indulgence – about the one between this particular mother and this particular daughter. About how we spent most of my life arguing bitterly, my mother professing that she didn't understand me, that I must be ill. And me, telling anyone who'd listen, that I was nothing like my parents whatsoever, *nothing*, a real outcast in my own home, an alien to my horrid family.

It was only at the age of 24, being taught to drive by my mother (and after various friends had smugly pointed it out) that I realised why we'd fought so bit-

terly. Taking in our wildly gesticulating hands, frenetically mobile eyebrows, predisposition to melodrama, and the ability to make a one-syllable word last for three – I realised I was my mother's daughter.

Her overloud, dramatic, vocal cadences I transferred to the stage. Her art of worrying I turned into a fine neurosis. Her complete inability to think calmly before speaking, that's mine, too. Don't get me wrong – some things I will never share with her: The ability to wrap presents, change a fuse, stick to lists, find the end of the sellotape, most of her opinions.

In temperament, we are carbon copies, and this is where we don't always work. Where we don't quite fit in. We expect and demand an immediacy from people, an instant rapport, which can be exhausting if you like to get to know someone first. My early boyfriends, for example, were judged on two basic criteria – will they talk, and do they eat? As most of them were stoned, greasy-haired musicians, they usually failed at the first hurdle.

And tempers – tempers don't go down so well here. Many people prefer to stew or bear a grudge, whereas we tend to get the bile out in one agonising, plaster-ripping showdown. And here I probably exceed my mother – my skills of tact and diplomacy can be roughly equated with a car crash.

* * *

Today I feel flat. Like dough that's been rolled out too thinly. Holey and strained, devoid of passion, incapable of definite emotion. Just a light-to-middling, all-pervading, drizzle of irritation. I just don't know if I'm strong enough, and just how strong I have to be.

We are going through A Bad Patch.

I'm not sure if a five-month relationship deserves the luxury of a bad patch. Surely that is the domain of longer, harder, gnarlier relationships than this ailing, suffering thing with wings broken? But Bad Patch it is. You see, she is also suffering from a crisis of identity, a chronic outsider complex. She is also from an island, from Essex. Anywhere can feel isolated if you don't fit in. My creative, artistic and musical girl, muted but silently raging for fear of sticking out. Marooned in Zone 6. You'd hardly guess her heritage, except sometimes an ill-judged shove on the Tube will see her trying to take on a 7' lump of muscle who looks like he might eat the heads off small animals for fun.

My beautiful, fragile, tough, pixie, superhero of a girl.

The depressing thing about getting older is that you start to recognise cycles, patterns – and when you're falling into them. The killer is that you know you're becoming drawn in, sucked in, pulled in by the roots – and you can't do anything about it. You can see it happening and are helpless, or unwilling, to get off. And then you become so internalised, so

caught up in the minutiae of the present, that the Things from Before/The Past/When I Was Small, the Shit you thought you'd dealt with, creeps up when your back's turned, and suddenly becomes the big fuck-off elephant in the room that starts trampling about on the furniture.

And then you're starving yourself, or vomiting at two in the morning, or banging your arms in frustration and wondering how to absorb it all.

Between the two of us, it can be quite a challenge. Today I am very alone.

Today I do not have her because I don't even have myself.

And forgive me, but yes – today I am an island.

So, just to cheer everything up a bit, let's go back to the nut house. To my sympathetic, Italian psychiatrist who looks like she might be from a different planet. Looking at me sympathetically as I tell her that, despite everything, we are good together, at times. Really good. But it doesn't come out convincingly – I feel like the distraught best friend on the phone, sobbing "But he's really great when we're not arguing/walloping each other/throwing each other down the stairs, blah blah blah."

But I'm not lying.

There are the countless, taken-for-granted, pieces of mundane magic: bed, warm and wrapped together like squashy jigsaw pieces; being earnest over bottles of wine and discussing existentialism, which neither of us really understands; swimming in the sea at Brighton Pride the day before we first kissed, and just before we got battered on herbal highs and my spit ran out; striding across Streatham Common on crispy Sunday mornings to eat school chips and beans; her sleepy, bug-eyed and beautiful face first thing in the morning; noodles and weird Korean beer; night buses and toast with Marmite; sneaky calls from the shop floor; flushed cheeks and spider lashes in the bath, or any of the amazing, difficult, electric, perfect days we've spent together...

....all live in permanent danger of being overwhelmed by Our Issues.

* * *

Mothers, islands, identities... From where do these misfit maladies spring? I feel that my explanations so far have been too easy, merely scratched the surface....

* * *

Seven months. Seven months and we have the break-up chat. Except we don't break up. And I don't know if this is the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning, or the protracted death throws of our sense of perspective, or the painful yet necessary birth of a new honesty. And I don't know how to convince her that I would do anything to save the precious and shell-less creature that is currently our

Relationship (if it was in the playground it'd get the shit kicked out of it by harder, tougher, coarser Relationships).

It's agonising how agonised we are.

Because when we forget to be introspective, self-obsessed and ridiculously psychoanalytical, well – then we have: The Beautiful Moments, the precious times, the instances that effervesce, which are when she is just so, and I am as is, and she is the same as me.

I believe in it still, because, as she says, when it's good, it's *soo* good, baby. And then she is my soul mate, and my best friend, and the person in my head or at the back of my neck or under my skin. Then it is me and her against the world, or perhaps apart from the world; floating in a golden, sparkly sea adrift and not caring. The times when I know that she is the only person in the world who could ever understand or appreciate what I'm saying at that moment; contrive what I mean by the way I'm touching her arm; what my face says as I screw it up, what that left eyebrow jiggling around is trying to convey; when it really doesn't matter what is happening outside our little sphere and I could lie with my arms round her for hours, days probably, and it would be enough, when we don't even have to speak, when we don't have to worry, when I don't know where I end and she begins. ■

Three Mazurkas

CAR Hills

28

3. *On the Beach*

After the day's sightseeing is over, there is often nothing for the passive, ageing homosexual to do except lie on his bed at the hotel. If he is fat, sleep will most likely come, and he will be spared the expense of an evening meal and the duty to seek conventional excitement.

Such a homosexual (I speak of myself, but also of others) is in a dilemma. He knows that his only hope of emotional sufficiency lies with men. He has women friends, but would scorn even to hire a female daily help. He wants to be possessed, but has learnt that every man in the world comes armed with a painful prick.

If he goes to a beach that is near a gay beach, and the two are linked by a small tourist railway (surprisingly often the case), the dilemma will present itself in acute form. On the family beach, if he is not entirely worn out, he will be refreshed by the elements. His love of life will return. The thought must inevitably arise of going where the painful pricks await.

Then he remembers that only the attentions of a glorious man (in short supply) could possibly make the experience exciting enough for him to get an erection, but that the mean thrusts of such a brute will cause him to lose it. And it will be difficult for him to wank himself off lying face down among the dunes.

If he has any sense, he will be content with the attentions of sun, sea and sand until it is time to return to the bus-stop. He will remain optimistic that, after a shower and a short rest, he will want to go out again.

But if a remaining impulse of courage and desire takes him to the gay beach, it will make no difference to his happiness. He may get to give a routine cock-sucking to an astigmatic youth who doesn't speak much English, nothing more. He has two alternatives: grim life or living death.

And if he remains on the heterosexual beach, and is of a malevolent turn of mind, he can look at the young couples, and the boys playing football, and comfort himself with the knowledge that, eventually, they will be as unhappy as he is. For the bleak truth of human life is that we cannot live together and we cannot live apart.

So he will conclude that the only reality is laughter and, after giving himself a good wipe, and with one last look at a particularly well-muscled boy, will move slowly towards the bus-stop.

There will be others waiting there with whom to exchange protests, and when the bus finally comes, all will forget their anguish. The movement of the bus through tower-block suburbs and along fast trunk roads will bring him an acceptable mixture of pleasure and pain.

Then a door will open, and he will be alone once more in the small, white en-suite room, turning his key on the world. A novel lies unread on the bedside table, and the television is switched off.

There is no sound. And, if he is lucky, he will enter the vast white tabernacle of sleep.

2. *Deadly*

The nine themes of judicial punishment are:

1. Exile
2. Loss of liberty
3. Pain inflicted to the body
4. Isolation
5. Deprivation
6. Amputation
7. Labour
8. Fines
9. Death

Which of these punishments is most terrible might be debated. Death is often considered a blessing, and exile has become a chief modern pleasure, departing entirely from the repertory of punishment. All are sometimes welcomed, except perhaps amputation and fines. Even a masochist can derive no pleasure from fines. The future of punishment therefore lies with them, larger and larger fines in proportion to the growing, indiscriminate wealth of human beings.

The return of amputation might also be considered. It involves an irretrievable loss. So it is a form of both deprivation and death. It is an extremity of pain and will involve isolation, loss of liberty and labour. Bearing such complex relations to all the rest,

it is an acme of punishment, infinitely more memorable than fines, although not so annoying.

Pain delivered to the body, even if it is taken to the death, differs from amputation in one important respect: the worst it leaves is a permanent mark, deprivation is not involved, as it is in all the others. Corporal punishment is thus the only one that is essentially carefree. It can be joyful.

The real difference between pleasure and pain is this: every pleasure is potentially a punishment, but every pain is not a reward. Many activities, such as knitting, chess and sex, have an equal potential for pleasure and pain. Reptiles can always tell the difference, human beings cannot, except when they are young, or when the world was young. Pleasure becomes pain in a lifelong pincer movement, and when the two are again distinct it is time for death.

1. *Manly*

I am the only customer and around me are the fine young men of Australia. I have just phoned Steve — he's been ill in May, deep affection in his words, not in his voice. Before that I walked along the ocean beach. A few very determined surfers and men in boats, and others swimming as night falls.

People jogging along Marine Parade, skateboarders hurrying past, loving couples. Schoolchildren

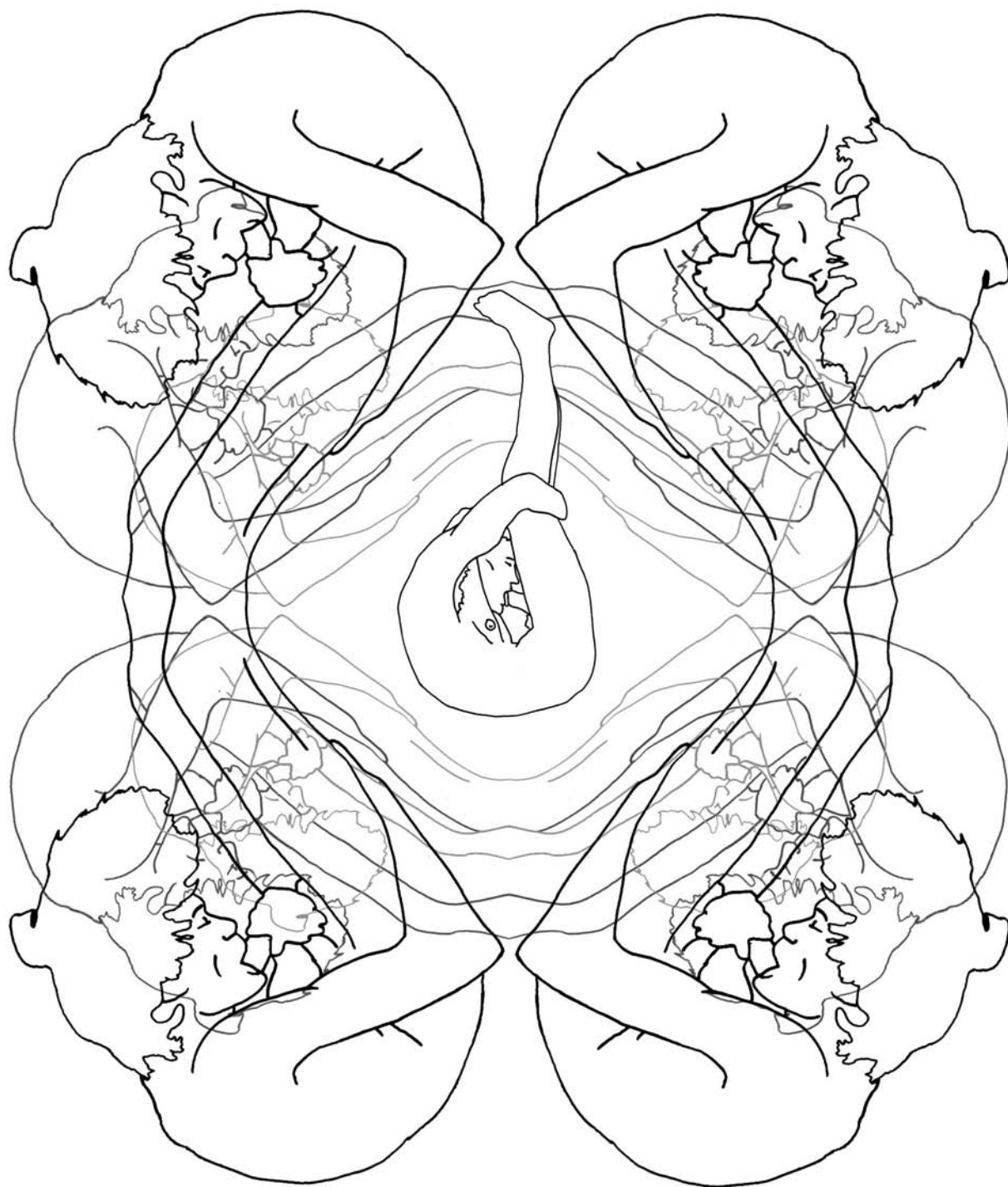
being led along with their violent talk, the cult of the body, the self-assertion that goes with it and the suffering that might come of it.

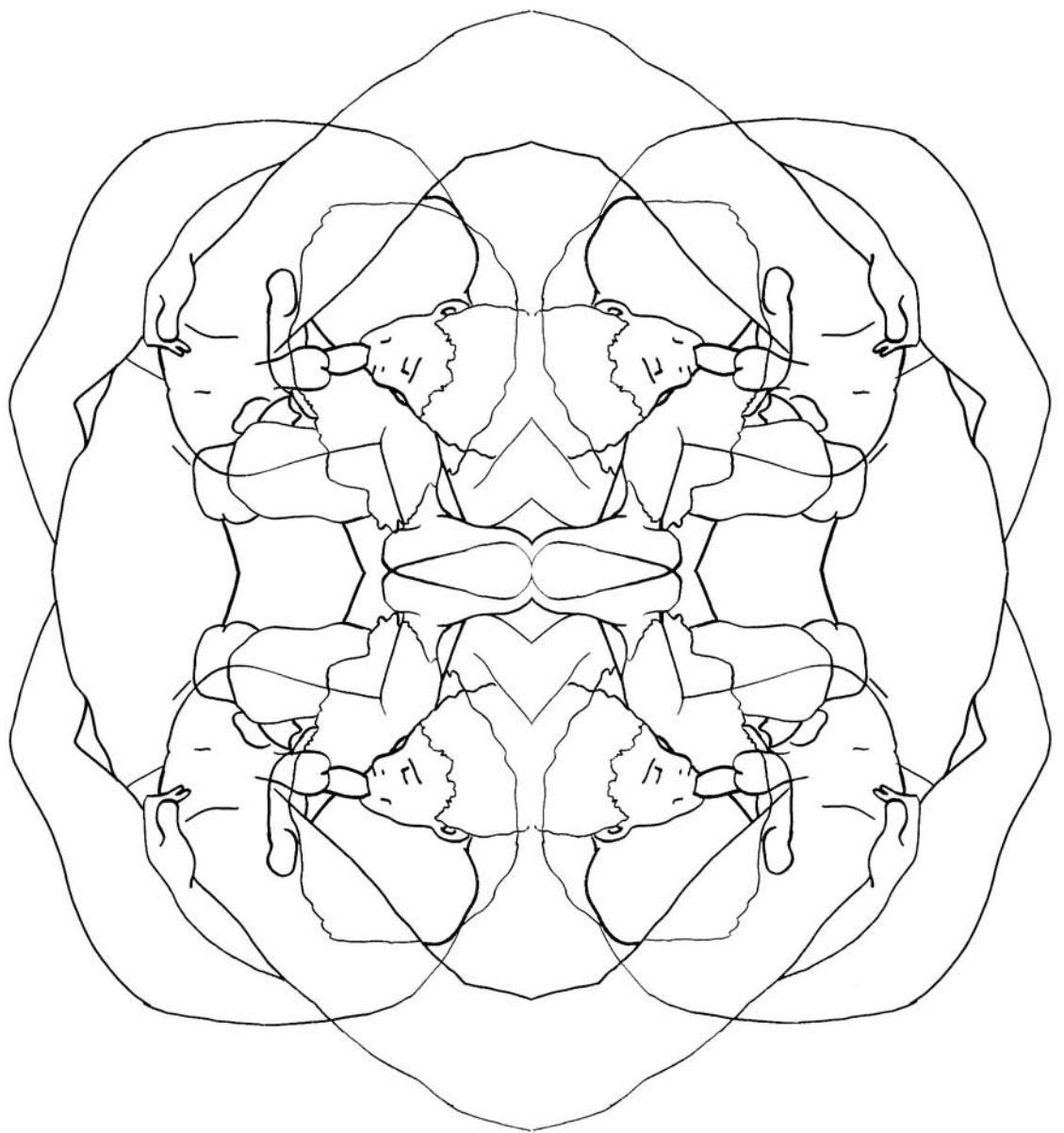
My friend added to my knowledge of Hyde Park Barracks: "It was a terrible place. In one period of 42 days in 1835 there were a thousand floggings, and it was never less than 50 lashes." [That's untrue: It was often 25.] "The governor would sit on his cane chair in the yard and say, 'Lay it on hard. He can take it. I want to see his claret.'"

I think I would bargain my soul to the Devil (if it is not lost already) to witness just three of those 42 days, with breaks for tasty meals, excited walks and stimulating reading.

But now my seat is in the bright café and I see the three phone-boxes and the ocean. My soul comes the nearest it knows to peace, far from all who know me, having talked to one I love, with the road, the cars, the lights, the men, the music, the shore. ■







Chroma's 2007 Reader and Writer Survey

Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey. Chroma has recently published Issue 6, and we'd like to know your thoughts, impressions and suggestions so far to help us keep developing and changing, and reaching as wide an audience of readers and writers as possible.

This survey can also be downloaded from our website: chromajournal.co.uk/survey. Please fill out the survey and return it to the address on the last page by 1 September 2007. All returned surveys will be entered into a prize draw and the 2 winners will each receive a case of 6 bottles of wine.

1) Which issues of Chroma have you read?

- 1 (Tormented) ☐
 2 (Beauty) ☐
 3 (Foreigners) ☐
 4 (Cinema) ☐
 5 (Competition) ☐
 6 (Island) ☐

2) How did you first learn about Chroma?

- Internet ☐
 Friend/Colleague ☐
 Bookstore ☐
 Review or article ☐
 Library ☐
 Advertisement ☐

3) Do you subscribe to Chroma:

- Yes ☐
 No ☐

If no, please give a reason:

- Too expensive ☐
 I prefer to buy single issues ☐
 Dissatisfied with quality ☐

4) Why, mainly, do you read Chroma? (tick 2)

- General reading pleasure ☐
 For the prose ☐
 For the poetry ☐
 For the artwork ☐
 Literary education ☐
 Other

5) Please rank, from 1 to 4, what attracts you most to Chroma.

- Publication of "new writers" ☐
 Editorial variety from issue to issue ☐
 Reputation of the magazine ☐
 Publication of established writers ☐

6) Do you respond (with a purchase or an inquiry) to the ads in Chroma?

- Sometimes ☐
 Never ☐
 Often ☐
 Ads? What ads? ☐

7) Are you satisfied with the number of pages and frequency of our issues?

- Yes ☐
 I'd like more than 2 issues a year ☐
 I'd like more pages ☐
 I'd like less pages ☐

8) On average, how much of each issue of Chroma do you read?

- Almost all ☐
 75% ☐
 50% ☐
 25% ☐

9) What is your preference for the balance of works published in Chroma?

- | | More | Same |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Less | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Poetry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fiction | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Essays | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Criticism | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Art/photos | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Book reviews | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10) What do you think of the overall quality of work published in Chroma?

- Very high ☐
 Inconsistent ☐
 Sometimes too highbrow ☐
 Sometimes too experimental ☐
 Not provocative enough ☐
 Other

11) Do you enjoy receiving our e-newsletter?

- Yes ☐
 Indifferent ☐
 No ☐
 Newsletter? What newsletter? ☐
 I'd like to get it. My email address is

12) Please indicate which of the following features, if any, you would like to see in our newsletter.

- News about Chroma events ☐
 General news about the literary world ☐

News about writers/contributors ☐
 Opportunities and resources for writers ☐
 Other _____

13) Would you like to see more guest editors?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 I'm happy with the way things are ☐

14) Would you like to see more established writers?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 I'm happy with the way things are ☐

15) Would you like to see more visual art?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 I'm happy with the way things are ☐

16) What about the selection of themes –

Satisfied ☐
 Needs to be more eclectic ☐
 Should be more topical ☐
 I'd rather not have themes ☐
 I'd like to see an issue about _____

17) Which story/ies did you particularly like? (if you can't remember the title, describe something you remember from the story)

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

18) In terms of layout and design, do you find Chroma –

Easy to read ☐
 Aesthetically pleasing ☐
 Has a unique style ☐
 Needs more colour ☐
 Other _____

19) How many of the following types of books do you typically read in a year?

	0	1-4	5-9	10-19	20+
Fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nonfiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criticism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20) Where do you usually buy books and single copies of literary magazines?

Books
 Lit. Magazines ☐
 Internet ☐
 Bookstore chains ☐
 Independent Bookstores ☐

Other _____

21) Are you a member of or donate to:

Society of Authors ☐
 Writers' Guild ☐
 PEN ☐
 Other literary organization (please name) _____

Museum/Art gallery (please name) _____

Amnesty International ☐
 Greenpeace ☐
 Oxfam ☐
 Other charity (please name) _____

22) Have you participated in a writing program, conference, or class?

No ☐

	<i>Current</i>	<i>Past</i>
Yes, as a student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, as a teacher/panelist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23) Have you submitted manuscripts to Chroma or elsewhere?

No ☐
 No, but I'd like to ☐
 Yes, submitted to Chroma ☐
 Yes, submitted elsewhere ☐

24) If you've submitted to Chroma, were you satisfied with the selection process?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Indifferent ☐

25) I'd like to receive more detailed feedback on my work?

Yes ☐
 No ☐

26) I'd be happy to pay a fee for detailed feedback on my work?

Yes ☐
 No ☐

27) Who else reads your copy of Chroma? How many people?

	Pass-on	1 person	2	3	4 or more
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colleague	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

28) After you and/or others have finished reading Chroma, what do you usually do with your copy?

Save for personal library ☐

Donate to office or other organization ☐
 Discard ☐
 Recycle ☐
 Sell ☐
 Other _____

29) Have you attended a Chroma event before?

	Yes	No
Launch party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30) Would you like to see more events? What kinds?

	Yes	No
readings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
open mic nights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
advice surgeries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31) Do you have Internet access?

Yes ☐
 No ☐

32) If yes, where do you access the Internet from? (Tick all that apply.)

Home ☐
 Office ☐
 University/school ☐
 Library ☐
 Other _____

33) How frequently are you on the Internet for e-mail and the Web?

	E-mail	Web
Daily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every few days	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

34) Do you purchase things online? (Tick all that apply.)

Yes, for personal use ☐

Yes, for business use ☐
 No ☐

35) How often do you visit the Chroma website?

Weekly ☐
 Monthly ☐
 A couple of times a year ☐
 When the e-newsletter arrives ☐
 Website? What website? ☐

36) Select 7 features you would most like to see on the Chroma Web site.

Literary news ☐
 Stories/poems from past issues ☐
 Submission tips ☐
 Extensive literary links ☐
 Writing tips ☐
 Book recommendations ☐
 Live chats with authors/editors ☐
 New books by Chroma authors ☐
 Calendar of readings/events ☐
 Discussion forums on literary topics ☐
 Original stories/poems exclusively online ☐
 Comprehensive index ☐
 Updated author bios and news ☐
 Letters to the editor ☐
 Online renewal/ordering ability ☐
 E-mails about site updates ☐

37) Would you be willing to pay a nominal fee to access some of these features?

Yes ☐
 No ☐
 Maybe ☐

38) What do you generally do when you find poems/stories of interest online?

	Poems	Stories
Read online immediately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Print out to read later	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bookmark to read later	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

39) When you visit literary Web sites, are

enter our prize draw

you more interested in finding works online, or in reading articles about authors, books, and writing?

Reading articles about authors/writing ☐
 Finding works online ☐

40) How do you usually find Web sites? (Tick all that apply.)

Search engines ☐
 Links from other Web sites ☐
 Reviews/articles/listings ☐
 Colleagues/friends/family ☐
 Newsgroups/bulletin boards ☐
 Banner ads ☐

41) Please name your three favorite literary websites (other than Chroma!)

1 _____
 2 _____
 3 _____

42) Please indicate your gender, age, ethnicity, and where you live.

Gender:

Lesbian ☐
 Transgendered ☐
 Gay ☐
 Bisexual ☐
 Straight ☐

Age:

18-24 ☐
 25-34 ☐
 35-44 ☐
 45-54 ☐
 55+ ☐
 Under 18 ☐

Ethnicity:

Please define: _____

Where do you live?

City: _____

Country: _____

43) What is the highest level of education you have completed? Indicate if you are still attending.

(still attending? _____)

44) What was/is your main course of study?

Liberal Arts ☐
 Creative Writing ☐
 Literature ☐
 Sciences ☐
 Other _____

45) What is your occupation?

46) What is your total household income (including yourself as well as others you live with)?

47) Do you buy single copies of any of the following magazines? Do you subscribe?

	Single Copy	Subscribe
Ambit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diva	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay Times (GT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Granta	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
London Review of Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Magma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New York Review of Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paris Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry London	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poets & Writers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sable Lit Mag	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wasafiri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thanks for taking the time to fill out the survey. We appreciate your input.

To enter the prize draw, please complete and send this slip back to us. Please note that all slips will be removed from the survey to ensure the confidentiality of your answers.

Name: _____

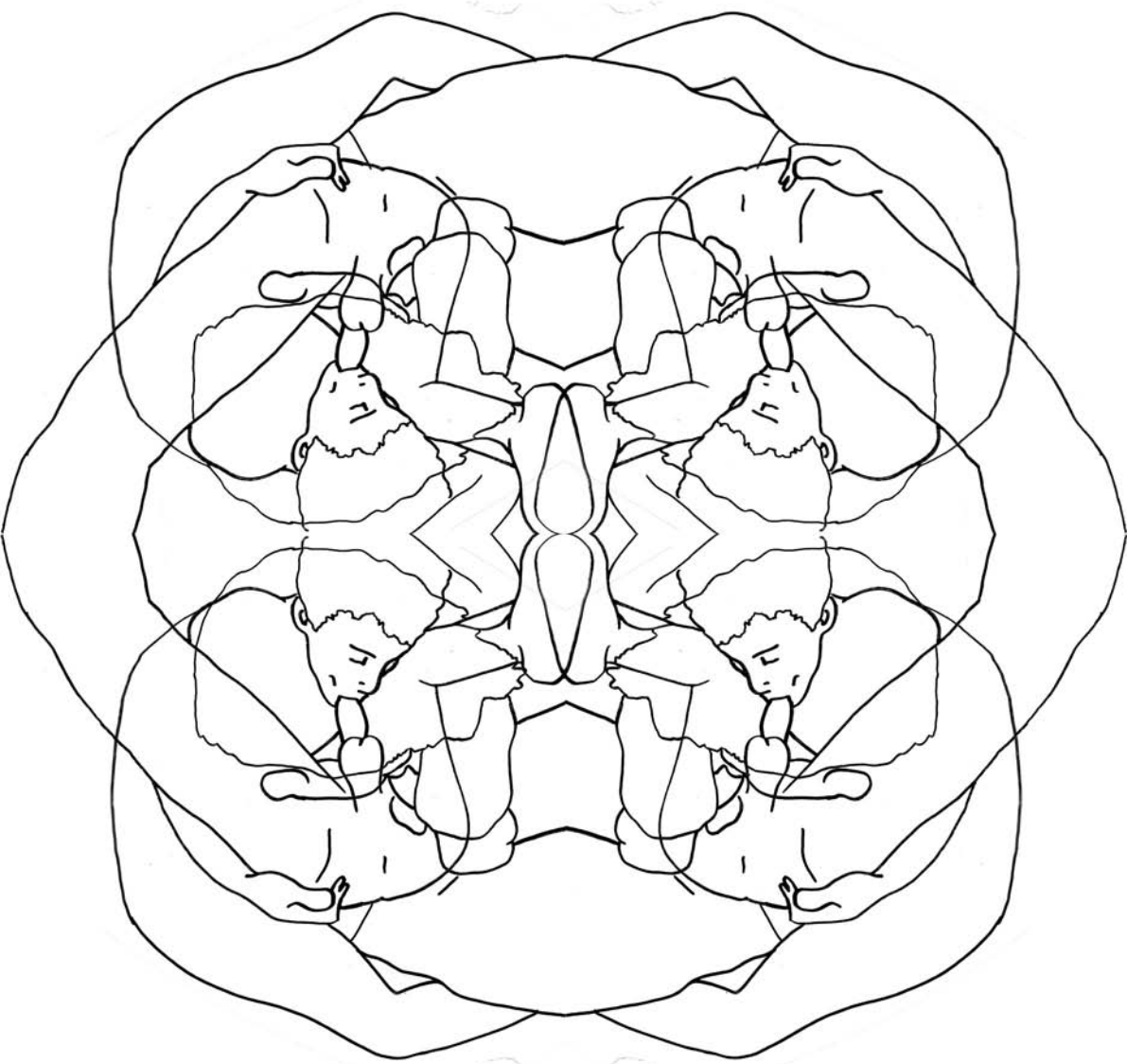
Address: _____

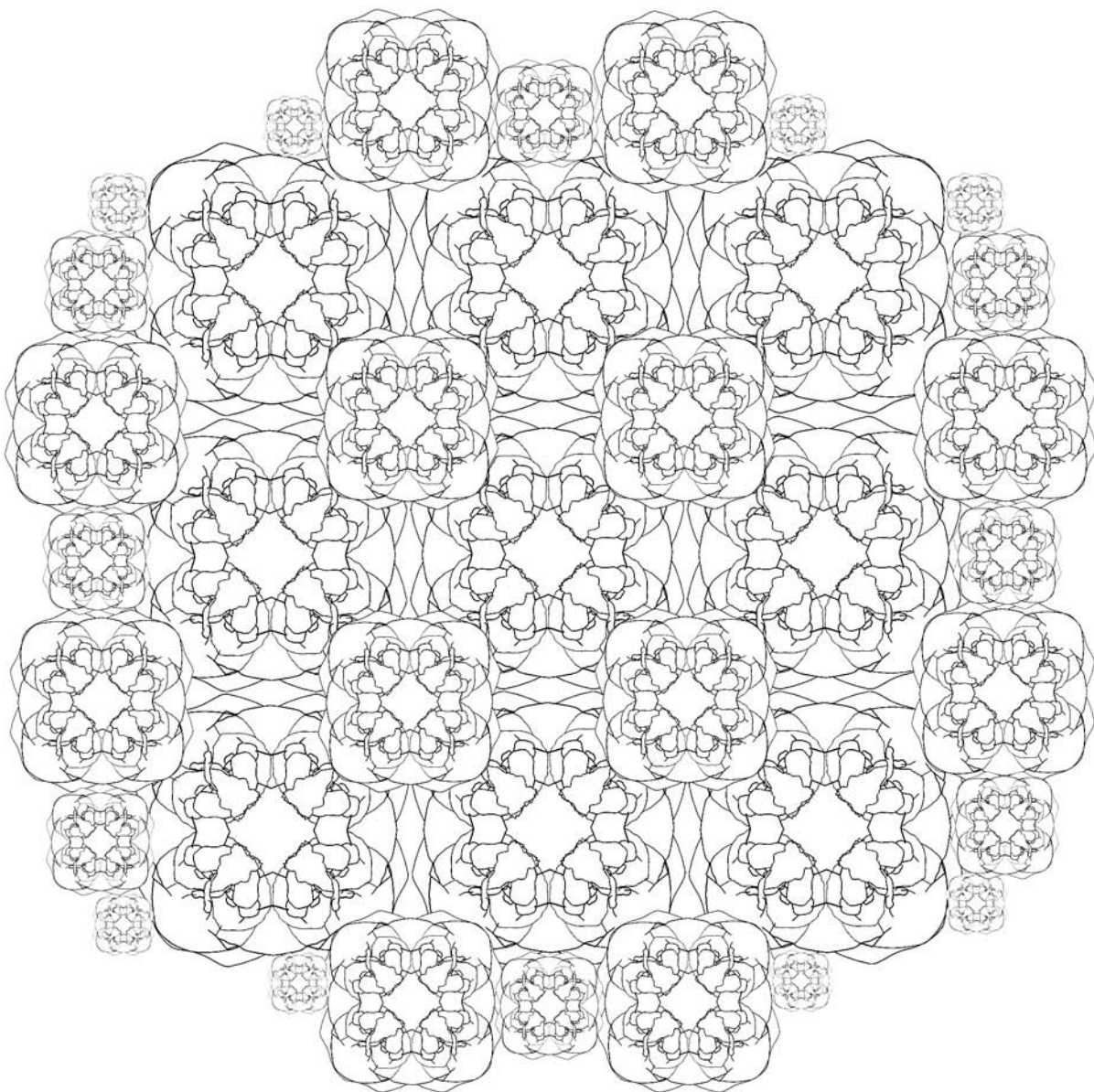
Email: _____

Please return to: Chroma Survey, PO Box 44655, London N16 0WQ

Please keep me informed of Chroma events. ☐

Only contact me if I have won the prize draw. ☐





QueerBashers

Micky Silver

32

1

S talking. But you're no stalker.
Target in blue trackies. White stripe right down the leg. White sports top. Expensive trainers. Postie uniform in his sports bag.

Fair hair. Number 1 back and sides. Combed forward on top. Little tuft at the front. Wax. Sideburns half-way down the ear. Stubble glistening like sand-paper in sunlight.

Small straight nose, blue eyes, not many spots, thin lips, regular features.

Slow, confident swagger, whole body moving like a machine. Gym toned. So cool.

Build up speed. He's turned left, as always after working out. Meeting his mates for a pint. You know all about him. Who he is. What he does.

You follow. Fifteen paces behind. Feigning indifference. He doesn't suspect how vulnerable he is.

Quickens his pace now. Senses someone behind. Starts running. Hasn't looked properly. You're there all right.

So is Spider. And Hornet. In front. Ready.

Thwack!

He stops. They're waiting. Hooded. Baseball bats raised.

To the left - Spider. And bushes. To the right - more shrubbery. And Hornet.

No one else. It's getting dark. Early evening. Our prey's cornered. And bleeding. His head... but he's too worked up to know how badly it hurts.

Flight! Still has that option. He can run away and survive. And that's what he does. Turns tail. Flees. Just as you expected.

Spider and Hornet laugh and set off in pursuit, a leisurely sprint, the luxury of successful hunters. He's trapped and you know it. Only he doesn't.

Because you're waiting.

Forgot about you. The very reason he ran into your mates and is now running away from them.

"Yeah! Silly fucker! Didn't think! Made your mistake! And this is the biggest mistake of your life, innit mate?"

Because you're ready. Weapon panting for action.
"Oops!"

He runs right into you standing there like a slab of marble. Holding out your knife. Stops him dead in his tracks. Feel his flesh yield to the point like a sprung mattress. He can't back off. They're right behind him.

You're trying your best to be hard. Gets easier each time. Steeling yourself to push it in him. Relishing the terror in his widened eyes, locked into your stare.

That's all you want. To frighten him. Make him feel... *but it's too late, baby, now it's too late, though we really did try to make it...* you think of the song. Carole King? Anyway, long before his time... *something has died inside and I can't hide it I just can't fake it, oh no...*

But then - crash!

"You stupid clumsy twats!"

Spider and Hornet have only gone and fucking killed the bastard!

"I said go easy with the bats. Now he's dead. Ain't ever gonna know why we executed him."

You never got a chance to test your blade.

"Carve the reason on him!"

Tear off his T-shirt. Smooth back.

"That's it. Capital Q. Capital B. Let them figure it out. Make sure the next one lasts a bit longer, otherwise we're wasting our time, not getting our message across. They gotta know why we're doing this."

2

"OUR SON WASN'T GAY" screamed the tabloid headlines.

Timothy Knight, 22, was a good lad. His tearful parents called for the killers to be brought to justice. His girlfriend Kelly couldn't accept he'd been murdered that way.

Back at Tim's house after the funeral, his best mate Mark followed Kelly around as she served tea.

"Can't believe anyone could beat him, Kel."

Kelly knew Mark was distraught. Tim was the second of his friends to be murdered.

Jason had been more of a follower, not a leader, like Mark and Tim. He'd been the first to be killed. Well, second, if one counted Jamie. Jason was the first

to have the word QueerBashed carved onto his back.

Mark's mind was a swirl of confusion. Had Tim and Jason been...? They must have, there was no other explanation. After everything he and his mates had... and someone was in the know, more than him. He felt a fool. He thought he knew his friends.

He cornered Kelly while she was washing up.

"Don't understand, Kel. They must've been doing it right in front of me, and I was too thick to notice. But Tim weren't like that. It don't make sense. And who found out?"

Kelly shrugged. Her blue eyes screwed up into tiny pinpricks and squeezed out the tears. Her hands gripped the sink.

"Sorry, Kel."

Mark thought he ought to put an arm round her, to comfort her, but it felt so awkward, she moved away. He kicked himself. Stupid wanker! Bringing it all up so soon after the funeral. That was bang out of order. Her boyfriend had just been buried and he was raking up all the dirt. Should've realized. How must she feel, he wondered, as he opened another can of lager. She could've been hitched to a fucking batty boy.

But Kelly couldn't let it go either.

"Am I missing something, Mark? We loved each other. We were going to get engaged. How could anyone think...?"

Mark never told her how scared he was. What if the killers thought he was queer, too? After all, he and Tim had been inseparable since primary school. Grown up together. Played footie nearly every day. Regular evening matches for Roehampton Rovers in the South West London Youth League First Division.

He'd even questioned his feelings. But not for long. No, he didn't like Tim in that way. Just thinking about it made him want to puke. He could never do that, fuck no. He was normal. Really was. If anyone came after him, they'd soon realize their mistake. Besides, he could easily look after himself.

And Kelly.

Yes, he liked Kelly.

Kelly was fit. Kelly was fucking fit. He'd like to give her one, though best to wait a bit for all this to blow over. Not a good idea to wade in on his dead mate's ex so soon. Looks suspicious. He'd end up being arrested.

Best solution was to get bladdered. Put it out of his mind. If the killer was wrong about Tim and Jason, he'd feel the full force of the law. If not... Mark nodded to himself over his lager. Served them right. Fucking shirtlifters. Turd burglars. Mark hated them. Would beat up a poof as soon as look at one.

The natural order of things.

3

DCI Brian Dallowfield opened his flipchart and hushed the incident room.

"What have we got so far?" he addressed his team. "Three young men brutally murdered on Barnes Common, two of whom have had the word QueerBashed etched onto their backs with a sharp instrument."

"The first victim, Jamie, also 22, was stabbed in the chest and kicked to death. But I don't understand why the killers didn't brand him, when he was openly gay, yet marked both subsequent corpses, whose sexual orientation's been called into doubt."

"It's possible," he continued, "that Jamie was killed on impulse, and only later did the murderers decide to make their actions explicit."

The uniforms conducting door-to-door enquiries had nothing to add. A wall of silence, like the one after Jamie's death. Dallowfield remembered those visits. The victim's partner, Andy, passed out when he broke the news. The second time Dallowfield had noticed the bottles of pills on the bedside table, but insisted on talking, despite the pleas of Andy's mates that it still wasn't a good time.

Andy had lifted his eyelids slowly, taken in the copper with a glazed look, then signalled to his friends to back off.

"I'd been waiting for Jamie to come round," he murmured, each word a struggle to articulate. "I got worried when he didn't show, and his mobile was off."

His eyes shut quicker than they'd opened, a tear dribbled down his sweaty cheek and he was out again.

"He's on antidepressants," his mates explained. "Hasn't moved from his bed and keeps having nightmares."

As he was leaving, Dallowfield stopped by the front door.

"Oh, one other thing. Stay away from the Common. It's dangerous."

Months passed. There were no new victims.

For the families of the dead youths there was no catharsis, no relief. Counselling, victim support groups and bereavement advice merely chipped away at the monstrous block that had intruded into their lives and displaced their loved ones.

4

Mark bided his time before making his move. He'd been drinking in the Duke's Head. Not a good idea for pulling. He was lurching about, stinking of beer, when he finally put his arms around Kelly.

"Kelly, babe, how about me and you?"

He slurred his words and staggered, almost falling over and taking her with him. She shrugged him off and moved away, furiously tying her crinkled blonde hair into a ponytail and then undoing it. That's when he lost control and started pawing her pert little tits and leering into her face.

He opened his mouth to say something but nothing coherent came out, just alco-breath. She slapped

his cheek hard and shook her head at him.

"In your dreams."

He jerked backwards like a wooden puppet. Never been turned down by a bird before. Never really had that many chicks. In fact, never had any girlfriends. Kelly was gonna be his first, but she was his first disappointment.

He looked at her, his mouth wide open. Tears flooded his eyes. Pity welled up in Kelly and she broke the unbearable silence.

"Sorry, Mark. I just can't. Not after ... You were a good mate, but Tim'll always come between us."

She walked away, cute little lipglossed mouth twisted with disgust, high heels going clackety-clack. He never saw her again.

That night she decided to leave Roehampton and live with friends on her Fashion and Design Course in Islington.

While she was beginning her new life, Mark was crying himself to sleep. Not only for losing Kelly. But for never having her. And for Tim. And Jason. And himself.

Then the phone-calls started.

5

The first one was at work in the photocopy shop. A man rang and asked to speak to Mark.

"You're next, mate."

He hung up.

His insides heaved.

It was what he feared most. But at the same time he didn't know. The confusion was doing his head in. He dialled 1471 but the guy had withheld his number.

He wanted to go to the police, but they would want to know the truth. Of course he couldn't tell them, could he? And he wasn't a gayboy, was he? How would the caller know, and how could he prove he wasn't? The cops would ask him about his friendship with Tim and Jason, about everything they did together. It'd get out, their little secret, somehow. He'd try his best to keep it quiet, but they always manage to wheedle it out of you. He knew he'd slip up. He couldn't face that. Maybe that's why Kelly said no. Perhaps the caller warned her off. Said, "Don't go with Mark, he's a..."

Not thinking straight. This was all nonsense. He knew that. His mates did, too. But the murders and the phone-call had sown the seeds of doubt. And deep down the real question remained. Maybe the caller knew.

He tried to contact Kelly, ask her if she'd had any weird phone-calls, but her mum just said she'd left home and didn't know where she was. Somewhere in North London. Finsbury Park?

Mark took to hanging around outside her college (he couldn't get in without a security pass) but she never seemed to be there, and no one he quizzed rec-

ognized her name. Eventually he gave up.

After a couple of weeks he'd had three more phone-calls – at work, and more worrying: at home late at night or during the day. Always the same words, "You're next, mate." Always the caller hung up immediately. Always number withheld. Mark never had a chance to speak. Just say, "Hello."

Telling the police wasn't an option. The caller must've known that. Mark quailed at that thought.

He'd be ready, though. He was no wimp. He was a fighter. A survivor. Jason, well, he was a bit of a weed. Tim was just unlucky. And if what they said was true, no wonder they rolled over and took their punishment. Probably enjoyed it. No, mustn't say that. They'd been his mates.

He carried his knife at all times. Just to be sure, be on the safe side. Four-inch blade. Flick-knife. Illegal. Kept it well hidden. Police mustn't know about it. Dodged the amnesty. Needed it for protection. Knew how to look after himself, and that was what he was gonna do. And get over Kelly. Move on. Pull another chick. Maybe take a leaf out of Kelly's book and leave home. Put the past behind him. Forget. He'd get through this.

He'd still hang out with his mates, though. Play Youth League Football with them on the Common, in the field by the station, next to the path alongside the railway hidden by trees and bushes.

But it was all dreams. He'd never move, never go. Didn't have the means. No money, no prospects. And life at home was comfortable. No incentive to leave.

The phone-calls became so infrequent he could almost say they'd stopped, although the cautious streak in his character refused to admit the storm was over.

Weeks passed, then months. He began to forget about them, and wasn't woken up in the middle of the night by panic attacks any more. He was amazed how well the brain can switch off. But there were always reminders of Tim and Jason, and things he preferred to forget, and with these came pangs in the pit of his stomach as he fought to put them out of his mind and get on with his life.

6

Still no luck with chicks, although there was one he fancied. Blonde streaks. Pink puffa jacket. Cool shades. Massive tits. Bubblegum. He'd clocked her in the Duke's Head a few times eyeing him up, but she seemed spoken for, with a shaven-headed bulldog of a bloke, all vest, medallions and tattoos, a geezer who viewed all potential competition with murderous intent. He kept his muscle-bound arms locked round his bird to protect her, but she looked bored, hemmed in and desperate to break free.

Mark was no match. Only 5ft 10. Slim – not skinny – but no body-builder. Just trim and fit from football.

Had a game coming up the following week. Home fixture. Barnes Common. One of the last in the season. Needed a win to stay up. Been a bad year, what with losing Tim and Jason and morale plummeting. Relegation to Division 2 would be the last straw, having to play wimps like Putney Athletic and Kew Rangers.

Monday afternoon found him training on the common alone at 5.30. Knocked off work early. Kick off wasn't till 6, but Mark decided to have some space to himself. For some reason he couldn't stop thinking about Tim and Jason. He wanted to score a hat trick and dedicate the victory to their memory. He thought about the secret they'd shared, the other thing that bonded them, and wished it wasn't true.

But corpses don't speak.

It was gonna be a tough game. Southfields were no pushover, and he was no striker. He'd only scored two goals all season, both flukes.

The May sky was overcast but the air was balmy. Upper 60s with a strong south-westerly. The trees and shrubs were green with spring's naive enthusiasm, and the grass smelt fresh and clean. Planes soared overhead, and the roar of traffic and clatter of the trains seemed far away, in a parallel universe.

Folk came and went, jogging, dog-walking or just on their way home from work. If Mark had been allowed one wish, it would be to turn the clock back and undo everything.

One by one his team-mates turned up with their little kit bags. Mark usually played in white T-shirt and black shorts, Rovers' official colours, but it was mild enough to brave a game bare-chested. He ran a few laps round the field to warm up and work up a sweat, and did some stretches.

Southfields arrived together with the referee from Croydon, a balding man in his early thirties, who, obviously resenting still doing matches at this level, impatiently fingered his whistle and barked orders at the lads. Kick-off was dead on 6.

Only three guys in sports gear and hoods bothered to cheer Rovers on. The same three who had seen the 4-1 home defeat to Merton Dynamo two weeks before. The entire fan club.

7

"What is that thick sod doing?" you say to yourself, as you watch Mark dawdling about. You're not too cross, though - it was great seeing Southfields get that last minute equalizer, which means Roehampton will go down. Mark didn't score - he had a poor game as far as you could make out from the edge of the pitch.

You can see he's gutted - at his own performance, the result and the relegation. Southfields deserved their draw - they fought back with spirit to make it 1-1 with a magnificent header. Apart from that it was a dead boring match, and from what you

gather the result helps no one, one point not being enough for Southfields to get promotion either.

Sun's setting and the light's fading. Mark's put his work gear back on and is walking towards the path to the bus stop. 72 or 265. Done the journey yourself many times.

You're right behind him, but he doesn't know that. Strutting along in his flash suit as the lampposts come on, and then for a second, hesitating.

Coming towards you are two guys in hoods and sports gear. Bigger than Mark, just as you're smaller. They're holding baseball bats, and they're looking straight at him. You're waiting, holding back, as you sense the hairs on the back of your neck freeze.

You think he's gonna front it out - he walks right up to them, but then bottles it and turns off to the right, into the trees. Sweet. You do the same, sprinting. You're a fast runner. You overtake him. He can't hear you because his feet are snapping large numbers of last winter's twigs. The scary guys are in pursuit.

There's nobody else around. You're way ahead of him now, careful not to get out of breath. And ready. You turn, and that's when he sees you. And stops. He peers into your face but your hood is up. That's thrown him. The words just come out. Calmly. You can't help it.

"You're next, mate."

He's collecting his thoughts. Gotta think fast, on your feet. Both of you have to. He decides to lash out. Crack! Right on your jaw.

"Agh!" you cry, and down you tumble, cradling your chin. Fortunately he hasn't done too much damage. But it fucking smarts!

Is he gonna leg it? No, the wanker starts fumbling in his Adidas holdall. Frantic. You couldn't *pay* for a break like that! You get up off the ground and punch him back in the face while he's panicking. Whatever he's searching for in his bag ain't there. Because you've got it.

He's recovered from the blow, coming forward, going for you. He's almost on top of you.

"Looking for this, mate?" you ask.

He's seen what you've got, but too late. You're advancing and he's still approaching. Too fast. Can't stop.

"Aargh!"

You both gasp at the same time, freeze for a moment and stare into each other's eyes. Your hand's over your mouth in a childish expression of feigned shock. Everything round you quivers. You both shake your head. In denial. He's focusing far out into the distance, then back at you, surprised. It's almost intimate, but different for him, as the cries die away. Yours because you went that tiny bit further, you had to, but pray you didn't want to. His because he didn't want you to either.

Smell his fear, watch the sweat trickle down that chiselled face, so young so... *why can't it be mine?*

Fine features, mean, almost stupid eyes, blue and cold, stretched with panic, mouth dropped open, hair freshly cropped, light brown, white shirt tapered, no tie, narrow black trousers, fit like a glove. Feel the material clinging to his thighs, waist, knees, the style, the sharp creases making him look invulnerable, the blade in your hand telling you he's not.

You've both made a mistake, but it only hurts one of you. This is what defeat feels like. The flick knife in his belly. *His* flick knife. The one you nicked from his bag when Roehampton scored.

'Eurgh!'

That's all he says. Then grunts. And wobbles like a jelly and slumps a bit. You're holding him up with your hand on the hilt.

Each time he tries to scream you push it in a bit more, like slicing through raw chicken. Listen to the rattle, he's catching his breath badly. Shut that fucking row, man, for God's sake, put your hand over his gaping mouth!

A ketchup bubble bursts between his lips. He looks like he wants to cry, but you feel like giggling.

The blade has hit home, in that soft, squashy bit under his sternum. Using the hilt as a lever you walk him back a few steps, and he goes weakly with the knife stuck in him. He just says "Uh-uh." You push him roughly against a tree.

Sour-smelling puke oozes from his mouth: liquid with solid whitish lumps of McDonald's chips mixed in. Blood from the stab wound drips down onto his trousers. He looks down, confused, at your hand and then back up at your face, puzzled, his own mug distorted with hate.

"Congratulations!" you say. "You've been QueerBashed!"

"But I ain't queer!" he protests with a hoarse cry.

"I know, Mark. Nobody said you were."

"I don't understand."

You laugh.

"Hear that?" You call out to Spider and Hornet, who arrive and have thankfully listened to you this time and controlled their urge to smash his head in. They nod and echo your laughter.

"He goes, 'I ain't queer!'" You turn on Mark again.

"Course you ain't queer, you stupid fucking cunt!"

Mark's eyes open wide with surprise.

"Do I have to spell it out, dickhead?"

He is sobbing now.

"This is for Jamie. Remember him?" Your voice shaking, you jab the weapon in on each word, making Mark cry out. Recognition brings his dull eyes back to life.

"Your mates kicked and beat him up, but you, Mark, you stuck the blade in."

"It weren't me! How do you know it was me?"

It's painful listening to Mark straining to croak

out those words.

"I saw you," you say. "We all did."

Once again Mark's eyes open wide, but this time with terror.

"Remember? There were four of us going about our business and you three jumped us. Guess you thought four poofs were a pushover. It's all coming back, is it?"

Hornet and Spider murmur. You carry on.

"We all hid, despicable cowards that we were. Together we could have stopped you and saved Jamie's life, but we didn't. It was each man for himself. If only we'd stood up to you, Jamie might still be alive today. There isn't a day when I don't die of shame. So we trained ourselves up and followed you. Got you one by one. Found out everything about you, all your movements, even knew where you hid your knife, the one you stuck Jamie with. Well, it's back home now, where it belongs. Atonement, Mark, for all of us."

He's looking up at you in horror. It's all clear to him now.

There's just a fuzzy blur in your head where there should be a slot for whatever makes us capable of feeling another's pain, and that's okay when you think of his family and friends. But not him. Just an electronic buzz going pkhhh. Weird how these things happen, like a disability. You're sure you weren't born like that. *Something has died inside and I can't hide it I just can't fake it.* Ain't that funny, Mark! Except he's not laughing. He's sort of belching. You want him to know this is the last thing he's going to feel, so he understands the consequences of his actions. A handsome face and smart clothes won't save him. You push the blade in as far as it will go and watch his eyeballs roll up so only the whites are visible, and heave it up and down, splitting open his supercool shell. The tailored shirt that once hid his guts, now yields them up.

You remove the knife with a slurp, and Mark makes another gurggle, exhales noisily and slides slowly down to the ground. You watch Hornet and Spider wince at the steaming blood and gore on the blade you shove right up to their nostrils.

"Bile, I reckon. *Homophobic* bile."

You roll him over and remove his soiled shirt.

On his smooth, lifeless back you carve (in smaller letters than on Tim and Jason's backs) QueerBashed, and wonder about adding "I murdered Jamie Roberts," but perhaps not.

8

Hornet drives you to his flat in Brighton. Your alibi. And then – and this is the best part – you forget all about Mark, Tim and Jason, and concentrate on important things. Like putting flowers on Jamie's grave.

The very next day. The first of many. The lilies you hope you've earned the right to lay there. Shame

has kept you from entering the cemetery.

Most of your words stay in your head, unarticulated, because each time you speak, your voice catches in your throat. But this is what you want to say.

"I'm sorry, Jamie. I'm trying to make it up to you as best I can, and pray justice has been done for you, so you can rest in peace. I don't suppose we'll ever meet again, because when I die I'm going straight to Hell. Although I guess I'm already there. Me and Hornet and Spider will dedicate QueerBashers to

avenge all our murders. In your name."

After a few tears for what might have been, you return home and scour the papers. One day you'll find something that saddens and angers you, and get in touch with your mates. Together, you'll do your homework, and when you're ready, you'll make that phone-call. And you'll know what to say.

"You're next, mate." ■

KOLLEKTIVE

INDIVIDUALITÄT



Jay Bernard

The Gentle Art of Persuasion

i don't remember the hotel
but i spent the first night kissing
a man who at the party
gave me vodka lime and lemon
we drank it from a bottle
and he held me while my girlfriend
stood there wide-eyed in the corner

we got into a taxi
and we spent the twilight soaring
watched the sun seduce the buildings
watched it tangle in the starlight
and all the time i listened
to the rumbling of the engine
to the sirens whirring past us
as we sped all through the city

i couldn't make the stairs
and i felt my phone vibrating
with the urgency of seconds
as they pass with vibrant colours
through the vodka and the lemon
i remembered i was fifteen
and i saw his face was grinning
as he helped me out the lift

*and we spent the morning touching
making contact like two magnets
like two opposites repelling
like two planets different orbits
i said i didn't know him
but my hands were not reacting
he was saying that he loved me
that he needed me this morning*

strangers touch you when you're ugly
it's a myth that you need beauty
to be thrown against the wall
because you're flattered by attention
because no-one's ever said that
they'll come speaking tongues in velvet
they'll invite you to be wanted –
sometimes you really need it
this affection from a stranger
in a stranger world of clubrooms
of synthetic love and camphor

i've met those who've left their faces
on the lonely floor of marriage
i've met boys who stand in fishnets
on the corner dressed as women
and when the morning comes
with its yellowing of secrets
with its own vicious police force
then it happens it's apparent

*that we spend the morning touching
making contact like two magnets
like two opposites repelling
like two planets different orbits
we say that we don't know them
in their passion they're not listening
but we really want to love them
and we needed them this morning*

House Sitting

Lisa Asagi

thursday

I don't hear you come in. Only feel you slip under the sheets. Cold skin stained with the smell of soap and floors burning.

friday

Alameda, like Manhattan, is an island. Secured like pin to bone by metal bridges.

There are some islands that are far strewn extensions of continent, long stabilized, then suddenly separated. Sometimes there are bridges to these islands, tensing over ravines made deeper by the sliding hips of current cutting through drowned villages, elephant graveyards.

Other islands are drifting. Are formed over fissures, fractures in the mantle of earth below miles of silent ocean. Releasing lava - brighter and hotter than blood - onto the surface. Rupture. Accumulation. Rupture.

The island I am from is one of those that are drifting, millimeter by millimeter, away from its source. Its bridges are interior. The longest one is suspended over a gulch called Kipapa. People have stopped their cars, breathed in, and jumped from this bridge.

Years ago when I first moved to San Francisco, I was told a strange thing by a neighbor, an old man who sat on the stoop balancing a pug on his knee. He said most people came to this city for one of three reasons. To jump off the bridge. To fall in love. To disappear.

We are driving to the supermarket to pick up groceries for the weekend. Down Marina Boulevard, at night along the bay. Clockwise. Water is a blanket. The park has turned into brush. Short miles away is San Francisco. Pleats of light as if the sky was pulled down, gathering stars. That is where we live. Shadows and headlight move across the blue walls of our apartment. It is asleep. It does not know it will not be awakened tonight. The truck pulls in and we wait because there is beautiful song on the radio. Your hands hold the wheel. When it is over, the engine unwinds, and we walk cross pools of light in the parking lot, our footsteps leaping like frogs.

saturday

We wake in your sister's bed. Her dog is trying to tell

you something. You unfold. I can hear how memory unfolds you into these places. Long cold feet printing upon the kitchen tiles to the back door. The key turns and undoes the lock. The dog clicks down the steps and you follow. When you come back we continue the short drive into sleep. How you pull the covers over your head and lean closer to me, ears red with cold. Through a tiny crack in my memory I can see us in the submarine blueness of this one particular morning, miles ago, now centuries, bioluminescence brimming quiet in our eyes and skin, slowly fading.

Hours later you have driven over the bridge into work. I am working here, as the dog leans against me and from the window we watch what the world is seeing. The way there is a yard bright and silent.

The island Alfred Hitchcock is from is not drifting, it is slowly being eaten by the sea. Cliff by cliff. Instead of coral reef, it is ringed by submerged acres of prehistoric forests, littered with sunken ships. What he loved about San Francisco was the quality of light, the possibility of dreamlike fog and starkly clear blue sky. It is here that he filmed "Vertigo." A mobius strip of desire and loss and memory. I watch this film once a year. And always I feel it sitting closer, becoming more beautiful and real.

Like pavement.

Like the day you took me to Fort Point. I was bone cold and we watched the sun leave the sky, exhausted after fighting. Echoes of waves tore across stone walls. It was here that Jimmy Stewart jumps into the water to save Kim Novak from drowning. The point in the film when everything becomes unexpected. Becomes more than a story. Becomes an overturning bridge. Where the fear of heights becomes equal to the fear of depths. What amazes me is how they keep saying the word *wander*. And how they are never wandering. They are following and they are leading, one and the other. Down a circular path, which, once begun, will neither intertwine nor end.

That evening you call from work and tell me about a three alarm fire, possibly arson. No one was hurt but it took hours to contain. It is almost midnight. Turning off the lights, locking the doors. I am

a stranger standing in your sister's dining room. Surrounded by pictures of her and her husband, of their families, of your family. It is a feeling I have had since I could remember. Fantasy of walking into houses of strangers. This is some one else's life. It is a secret feeling. To stand in the midst of this. As if living were films to be watched alone.

I wake up at 3am and can't get back to sleep. Need to get out of the house.

I can still see myself sitting on that back porch. Young woman in nightgown under night sky. Watercolor. In this picture she is thinking too much. Or not long enough. I won't know the answer to this

question for years. In this miniature self-portrait, it is so quiet I don't hear the plane passing overhead until the dog looks up. Lemon blossoms strain the air.

sunday

In the dream we are driving up along winding hills, small volcanoes smoking everywhere.

You stop the truck and we get out, walk down until we come to a beach where people are sitting, waiting. We ask them if everything is okay. They smile and tell us we should stay and watch.

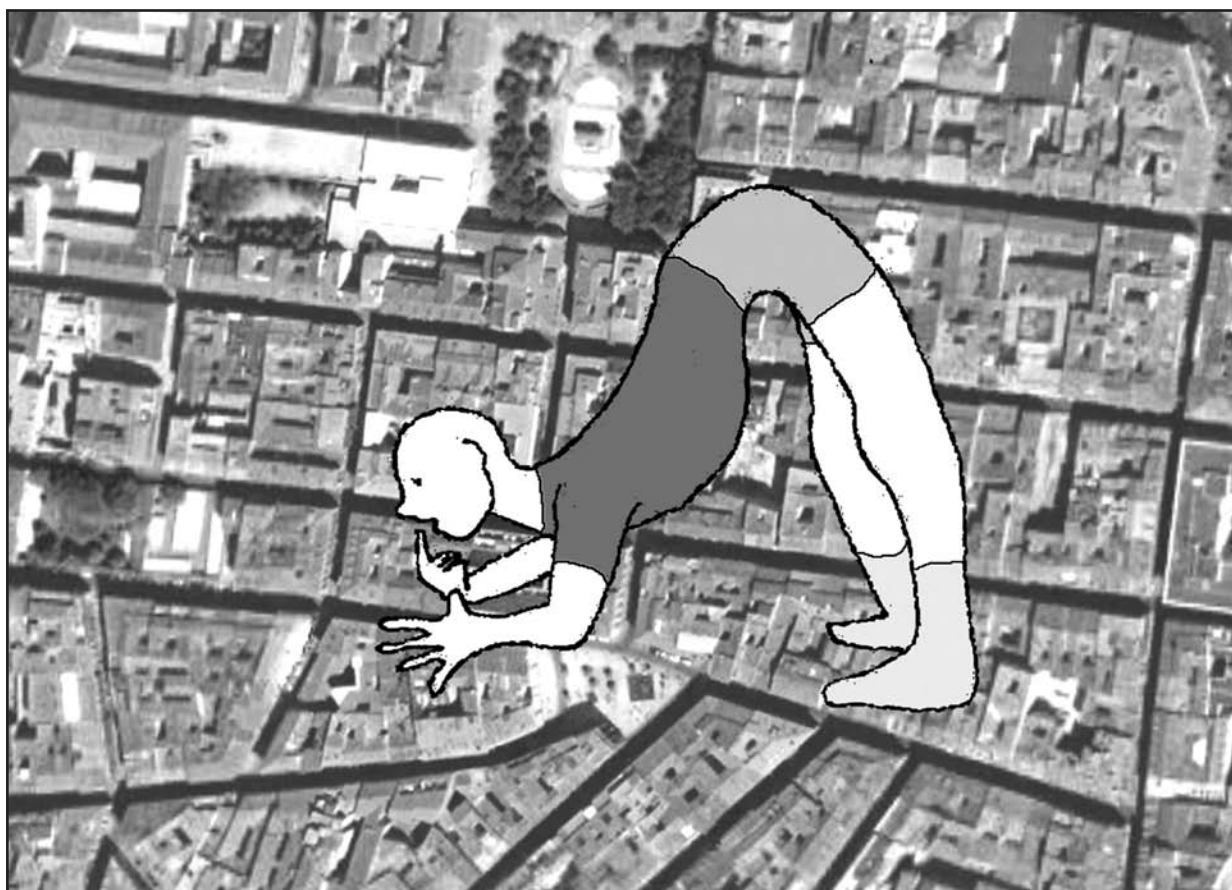
We get back into the truck and drive. ■

40

Wendy French Women Jumping

You went – so I'm told– feet first into the Thames
but Sappho – whose book was by your bed –
dives in blue waters which in the deepest depths are green
and she looks up to see olive trees with small fruits longing
to be picked and her sky is a water-sky – a dark appearance
of an under-cloud over open waters.

You do not feel the sting of sea-weed or remember
in those last seconds your loves and waking dawns.
Big Ben strikes a time you don't register – the cold dark bridge
remote from any Greek island where you journey to.
And unlike Sappho, gasping, drinking in salt water,
hands down, down, reaching for layers of gravel,
sand beyond the realms of poetry, pale silk clinging to her waist –
hair piled high on a painted urn – your distorted body
will never be depicted on a marble tile. You cannot rest
in murky waters – you're with Sappho in the ache of my body,
in the pace of the waters.



Simon Leah

Pin the Blame on the Donkey

42



I attended twelve primary schools. North Taunton's was the fourth, my third in a year, and my first since arriving back in the UK. It was here, across Mrs Thorn's crowded classroom, that I first saw Gareth. He was a pale, wet moppet with a blur of thick red curly hair. I liked him. He was a Homosexual, like me. Guessing the sexual orientation of a six year old in 1975 was simple. Gareth preferred Ermintrude the Pink Cow over Zebadee. He admired my canary-yellow I've-Been-to-the-Scilly Isles T-shirt. More proof came later, when, alone in a darkened room, without a word or swap card exchanged, he let me touch him. Inappropriately.

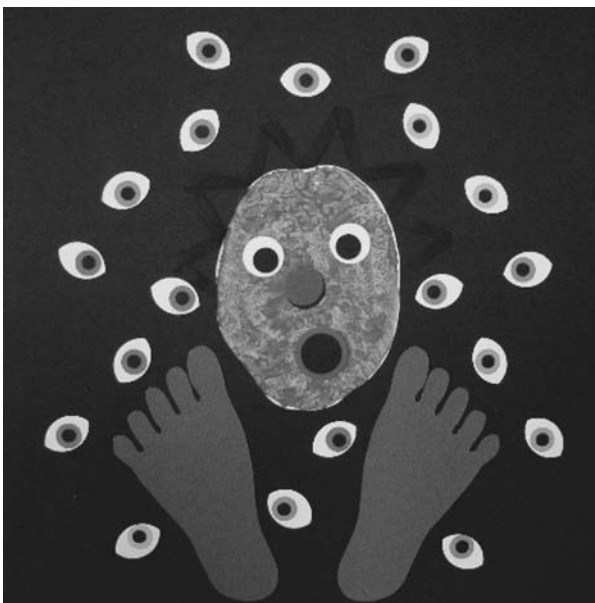


As a child, I spent hours alone, walking in local woods, picking wild flowers or collecting fungi that spewed it's bountiful seed when squeezed or stomped on. On my back in deep grass, I'd lie beneath the belly and between the twitching hoofs of our Jack donkey. His splendid organ, dusty and engorged, bobbed before me like an unbri-dled box accordion. I'd slap Jack's knob to see how it moved. In and out of it's sheath and through my hands. Sometimes I'd take my penny whistle to practice my fingering. Jack made an unreliable metronome.



Naked on the steps of Fursden Lodge, I built an igloo of mud coils in which to house my penis. Upon completion, as if by magic, an audience appeared. Inside the car, two strange and fully-clothed children peered out at me. Brenda, their mother, emerged from the driver's seat, smiled at my erection, then quickly mounted the stone steps and, unbeknownst to me, my mother.

43



When we arrived in Tasmania in 1974, Mum and Brenda were briefly employed as house-mistresses at a private girls school in Hobart. Nathan and I were the only boys on campus – treasured accessories – and privy to all the girls' goings-on. One night, in their perfumed dormitory, the boarders took their infant mascot, held me down and gave me love bites. When they tired of drawing blood, the girls broke out their make-up kits and painted my finger- and toe-nails with the flags of the world.

Earl's Court Trilogy

Alexandra Mankowitz

44

Longridge Road: Mavis

Mavis dedicated herself to constructing a giant knife. She wanted to see what would happen if she walked along its blade. Would she fall off to the right, left, or be sliced down the middle? Her feet were thick-skinned. It wasn't clear what led her to this, but for sure it wasn't easy on the block anymore for Mavis. To start with, she'd had the same bike stolen three times by her neighbour's delinquent son. And what takes primacy over even that is that Mavis was a cat and had no business with bicycles in the first place. In fact, what forced her to swim so deep in her introspective field was her most thorny confrontation with the "I Wasn't Even Wet" defence, which certainly didn't have the precedent the girl was leaning on when she shouted it in the communal hallway. For weeks she could have slept on it to iron it out but for the Spanish woman on the stoop screaming, "Why you letting my child to be fucking in you house", and no wonder, because 12 year-olds belong at their own home, not someone else's, and their dry holes should certainly not be plugged by bicycle thieves. Both days and nights might still have conducted a different disposition to the one that eventually engendered the knife, but what you're overlooking is that someone kept taking the key to the upstairs flat and slashing Mrs D's mattresses with scissors. And carving up the walls. A Russian name was enough in those days for a person to be suspected of pumping heavy gas through doors to murder a nobody. And Mavis would only have to walk a block to see Mrs Van Kilngman, who'd say she wouldn't bring her father home to meet her mother. Who wouldn't have gone home with her anyway. Who was dead. (Respectively). Ideally you will all now understand why the only logical step was the construction of the knife and ensuing experiment. But ultimately, she couldn't get more than one foot at a time on the blade because it hurt too much and she couldn't do mind over matter.

Nevern Square: Effy

What's an idiot? I'll tell you what's an idiot. An idiot is a person who listens to statistics and sleeps well. And Effy was an idiot. Every night he would take a

pin in his hand, close his tiny eyes, spin his globe, count to three, and stick it with the pin. That's what Effy did every night and every night it stuck somewhere else and that's when he would lie back on his plush pillow with his duvet tucked up to his armpits and say, "Now that's where bad luck is." And then the light was out and Effy was snoring. This went on for 37 years and 41 nights and there was Effy, ready to stick again when suddenly it occurred to him that he was an unmarried fat man of 64. It was worse when he looked down and saw that his duvet was tucked up to his armpits. Effy had been to a few places when he was 10. To the chemists before it was big blue and white. To the stationery store when it sold sweets, again when it no longer did, and repeatedly when it was a bookshop. Then it became a big green and white supermarket. Effy often went to the Algerian shop in the cranny, but never opened his mouth. Things really deteriorated when the hairy father and son sold their bakery to a company that made chewy focaccia and coffee for £2.99. And then Effy is sad to tell you that it's not as a stranger that he knows the scene at the end of Nightingale Place where some are watched, some imagine themselves being watched and others watch others watching others. Effy was not so out of place with Mr Self-Styled Martin Luther King Jr II, nor with the girl who belted out Chicago Is My Kinda Town, nor even the dirty flabby woman with wide breasts hanging like flat pillows underneath the stained I Love Venice T-shirt. So! You will not be surprised to hear that dwelling on all this put a swift end to Effy's mourning over the duvet in the armpits. He spun the globe anyway, back to the same routine, somewhere the pin struck Guadeloupe and Effy is snoring again. But that night a stranger broke into Effy's flat and murdered him slowly with a video cable. So that's an idiot, and a dead one, too.

Trebovir Road: The King of Earl's Court

The King of Earl's Court is dead. Gone, too, are his ties to Joan of Arc, because nobody will hear any more of what he said that day in Tennessee Fried Chicken. If he was a sheep, you would have desired

his yarn for cosmetic, rather than comfort purposes. Black, white, marbled and wiry was his hair and under it the brain a word salad full of washing liquid bonded without an ostrich's hinterland before the ring-a-ding-ding. And a felt chop poorly following nostrils in front of the acid for the phone, mapped in four acres of scat-scat fallen from the sack-sack, you never said who-who, did you. Bear in mind you shouldn't impugn a person merely for reporting what was in their head. The King of Earl's Court was not the type to gather 32,000 peasants, and far be it from him – Heaven Forefend! – to do like Jephthah and Othniel. More like one vast fallow auricular field, and seedless he. Each rattle folding its way into the furrows, rackety-rack, a screech on the train track, nothing at Earl's Court will bring him back. Music's only fun if you can turn it off. Otherwise it's a rapture that side of pleasure and the King was wont to hear not

only earways but otherways. All drums his body, anvils his arms, hammers his legs, a cochlear his heart, and the sum: one excruciating nightmare. As though someone should excavate ligaments for living strings and a pharyngeal sphincter for a horn. One benefit of the King's death, beyond the silence for him, is that people can now use the big square K&C rubbish bins where he used to sit all day, with his bum sinking in, and his arms and legs poking out. There were those glad to have the chance to get into his flat and re-pane his windows to something period-inappropriate, but more secure and easier to clean. His legs were very skinny and scabbed, but on the occasion of his death he stopped walking. So it seems petty to dwell on that. ■

Jim Nawrocki Hurricane

45

Anoles darted through the sunlight.
Up and down the streets, the peal
of ball-peen and apprehension.

Our days were framed by the view
of what was encroaching upon us:
the maw of wind, clawfoot arms,
churning across latitudes.

Over uncertainty and distance
we prayed through the phone:
your voice, sometimes, came through weakly
but the code remained, riding the wave of words

that floated with its multitude, always above us.
When I finally got to you I saw the evidence:
lashed strands, tarp to thwart the wounded rooms
hanging empty over the gray beach.

Currawong Crónica

Susana Chávez-Silverman

Para S.

Te tengo que escribir mi sueño. A pesar de los cries—penetrantes, ghostly, badgering o hechizantes—de los pájaros, some of which seem to go on and on, far into the night (y uno de los cuales me despertó por un momento anoche, around 3am: an electrifying, piercing, mournful, downward-falling wail que me hizo pensar en el último plaintive, beyond-hope cry de Rima, when the Indians were burning down her tree with her in it, in Green Mansions), I sleep well here.

Duermo profundamente and I wake at first light, or even before, con los primeros llamados de los pájaros del alba: el *too-who* y *cha-caw, cha-caw*, luego un uncannily pavorreal-mimicking chillido. Todos esos cries pertenecen al enormous currawong. El *wheweeee-uh* del pop-eyed, nocturnal curlew. Estoy aprendiendo, en persona (well, okay, *in persona avis!*), hasta la famosa risa del kookaburra. Can you believe it? Es así: *ooh-ooh-ooh-uh-ah-ah-ah-ah*. Semejante al haunted laugh de un hombre muy grande. Like, por ejemplo, el Herman Munster. Or, como si riera (as if!) el Lurch, from the Addams Family. Remember? Can you hear it?

I had a long dream. Close to morning it all came together, nítidamente y en secuencia. Lo recordé—lo recuerdo—todo. En absoluta, fotográfica precisión. Por eso me he quedado on dry land today. Aunque siempre me ha llamado la atención el coral (okay, okay, more as jewellery, lo admito), tú sabes que me *atterra* el solo pensamiento de un shark. Almost as much as bears.

But I think it was the human-tiburones I had no desire to consort with today. Por eso I encouraged you y el Paulie to go on that snorkeling trip sin mí. Alegué—and it's true-- que el medicamento me hace demasiado sun-sensitive como para pasar 8 horas a la merced del southern hemisphere sun, tan cerca del Tropic of Capricorn y todo, leche solar SPF45 no obstante. Alegué—and it's true—que como me había comenzado the rule (a deshora, just like last August on Robben Island, remember? When that Sangoma me hizo comenzar la sangre? What is it about my lunar rhythms y el Sur?) I was mortally terrified que

la presencia de la sangre would attract an underwater predator. Como por ejemplo un great white. Well it *could*, ¿que no?

Pero más que nada lo que anhelaba, lo que se me antojaba como un perfect day, era la absoluta soledad. Alone-time en un lugar comfy pero extraño a la vez.

Somehow, quería reproducir algo así como el aloneness que había sentido en Cullinan. When I first pitched up in South Africa. Pero without the grinding boredom. Sin esa horrenda frustración, el saber que I'd given my love to someone undeserving. Someone who didn't have the wherewithall (le faltaba algo fundamental: algo a modo de las herramientas, the skill, the precision y la pasión, OB-vio) to take the full measure of me. Someone who didn't even know what (or how much of me) he was missing.

Todos los días Howard went off, con su university degree en mining engineering, con su stolid conocimiento telúrico. Y me dejaba en casa. Or curling my bare tanned toes in the dry, pale-red dust outside. Se iba y venía de mí, a diario, y me dejaba, tierra incógnita.

Y dentro de mí la rabia y el early conocimiento de mi error—de mi largo, irreversible pilgrimage errado—se me subieron a la garganta. Se virtieron, corrosive, en las páginas de mi giraffe-print covered diary. Hot, bitter, resentful lágrimas vertí, también, en ese diario. A going-away gift de mamá y Daddy.

But why am I remembering this, telling you this now? About Howard? About my miserable stay in an Afrikaner diamond-mining dorp? Al menos it was mercifully brief. My body may have been what got me to South Africa, pero it was my brain got me out of Cullinan. Got me a job—one of just three lecturers in Spanish *en todo el país*—en UNISA. Got me to Pretoria, pero esa es otra...

Anygüey, I think maybe I'm telling you porque ojalá pudiera rebobinar. You know, rewind, to spare my 20-year old self toda esa angustia ontológica, erótica. Todo eso que viví tan (too much) a flor de piel. Uf! Sha sé, I'm sounding *really* over-the-top, melodramática, downright 'Tine. And besides—sigh—

no se puede. (Spare her). OB-vio.

So, la yo, la que (sobre)vivió hasta aquí, hasta estas blank pages, hasta este estar aquí rodeada esta vez no por tierra desértica, africana sino por todo este green austral, writing you, esta yo ha cambiado el script.

I feel warm, whole, open to the world. Expectant yet relaxed in my skin. "You are the place where something will happen," recuerdo esas palabras. From *Burger's Daughter* by Nadine Gordimer. Cuando lo releí el año pasado, antes de volver a Sudáfrica, it struck me as disappointingly literal, awkward, dated, demasiado Manichaean, in-your-face politics. Ay, cuánto me conmovió cuando lo leí en esos too-long, expectantes meses de 1982, sick with hepatitis (sick with yearning), mis padres hoping against hope I'd change my mind and not go.

Pero that was me, then. Y así también era el mundo: urgente, peligroso. Apartheid wasn't over, not by a long shot. De hecho, estaba casi en su worst moment.

Kwa-kwa-kwa grazna un pájaro, muy cerca de estas plantation-style white shutters, abiertas ceiling to floor en esta casa vieja, donde escribo en una gran mesa de caoba, maciza, oscura y pulida. *Ku-wa*, le responde otro, lejos, hacia el lado del mar. *Screee. Too-hoo, too-hoo.*

Sopla una brisa mañanera. No es muy insistente, pero hace frotar las huge, pale grey-green palm fronds, cual lijas, but so softly. Their feathery tips intertwine and release. The variegated *massangeana* rustles (joh, cuántas veces te me fracasaste en mi far-away Inland Empire de Califas patio!). A faint, eucalyptus-tinged scent floats toward me; la brisa me hace cosquillas en los tobillos. How odd, the feel of this dry, plant-infused winter breeze against my feet. Heme aquí, sitting by a wall of windows con vista hacia el mar, pero contenida, cocooned por todo este verde.

En mi sueño, I was back on campus. Muchas veces tengo este sueño, como si los parámetros de mi vida fueran los de un recinto universitario. Ugh! Is this my life? Como en esa novela, *Giles Goat Boy* de John Barth. Anygüey, era un campus de adeveras, como Dios manda. Huge, sprawling, mucho ladrillo. Bien old world o al menos, back East. Parecía Harvard. En otras palabras: my dream-version of a perfect campus, alegoría de un perfect world.

I had a large, pale, soft leather bag. New. Pero en todo el revolú del back-to-school, I had misplaced it. Me sentí totalmente bereft, perdida sin mi bolso. Como si ese bolso contuviera toda mi vida. Todo lo importante. My belongings, mis secretos.

Intuí que había dejado el bolso en el dining hall de una residencia, where I'd gone to look for you. La residencia era enorme. Era un beehive de actividad. Students coming and going, medio jostling each

other. Como en un *real* campus. Digo, no como en Pomona, where there are so few, el ambiente tan precious, rarified que casi nunca se ven grandes concentraciones de gente. No me sentía nerviosa ni hostigada. *Nadie me reconocía*. Era ese comforting anonimato I have always loved about a large university. Como Harvard. UCLA. O Berkeley, o Wisconsin.

Bueno anyway, a pesar de no haberme sentido muy hopeful about its recuperación, my faun-colored handbag was waiting for me en la cafetería. Me la entregó una trabajadora latina, y la abracé, sobbing de puro alivio. And then I went to look for you. Te busqué por toda esa colmena, subiendo y bajando, buscándote entre tanta gente, gente desconocida. De repente allí estabas. You put your arm out and stopped me, guided me; you pulled me, muy gently pero insistently over the threshold, into your room. Recuerdo que tu cuarto era grande, y había una luz filtrada, hermosa.

I was standing close to you; nos mirábamos intensamente. No había palabras. Era como si fuera la primera vez que nos veíamos en mucho tiempo. Coomo si nada, you were rubbing sunscreen all over my face. You were rubbing vigorously, like one does to a child, all over—en los ojos, hasta las pestañas! Me reía. *Stop*, te dije. I was afraid you would rub off el Erace concealer que uso, todos los días, on my scar, right by my left eye y sin el cual me siento exposed, unfinished, vulnerable. Let me, me dijiste. No importa. You don't need makeup. You're so beautiful.

(En esta parte el sueño overlaps with "la realidad." Digo, con historical accuracy. Every so often I ask you si se me ve la cicatriz. Me sacan tan de onda las gafas—even my zillion pairs of designer gafas de sol, lovingly RX-ed en el Claremont village por Dave, de Pigale Optical, quien trabajó en el eyewear de *real-ly* famous films like *Chinatown*, te imaginas? And *Risky Business*. Anyway, I'm paranoid que las gafas me sacan el makeup. Pero tú siempre me dices no, no se ve. Maybe una white lie; quizás blinded by love...qué sé sho.)

Al terminar esa (un) cover action, entonces me besaste. Era lento y sublime. I felt the contact, todos los contornos. Sentí tus labios en los míos, gentle pressure. Sentí el frágil contacto con tus dientes, touching the inside of your mouth with the very tip of my tongue. And then, no me acuerdo bien if we were lying down or sitting up, facing one another, en tu cama. It was late afternoon. It was us, *exactly* as we are. Quiero decir: I could feel and ascertain, en el sueño, que era real. Todo parecía heightened. I'd say "slow motion," pero no lo era. It was, rather, that I possessed the attentiveness to time and sensation of a waking dream. O de la vida misma. I remember your hand was on my lower back. It moved caressingly, hypnotic, firm. Muy lento. Sólo se desplazaba cosa de one inch. Inch by inch. I was acutely attuned

to that very small place, allí, donde me acariciabas.

We had all our clothes on, todavía. They were more or less loose-fitting (como esos pantalones de hombre, pseudo army-navy, que uso. I think I was wearing those). I remember I ran my arm, my hand, up under your shirt. Con la mano derecha te tocaba el flanco, te abrazaba. With my fingertips I could feel your skin, the definiteness of you, warm, present. Con las yemas de los dedos te rocé la piel, sentí el pulso en tu cuello, my fingers skimmed over and paused at your nipple. Taut. Sentí la respiración; it was yours and mine. You drew me towards you, con la mano derecha.

The sun is up now. Frangipani, sun-released, wafts in through these open shutters. Una pequeña mariposa amarilla drifts, pauses near the shockingly purple row of crotons. The fish kite and the hammock stir on the porch, languidly, invitingly.

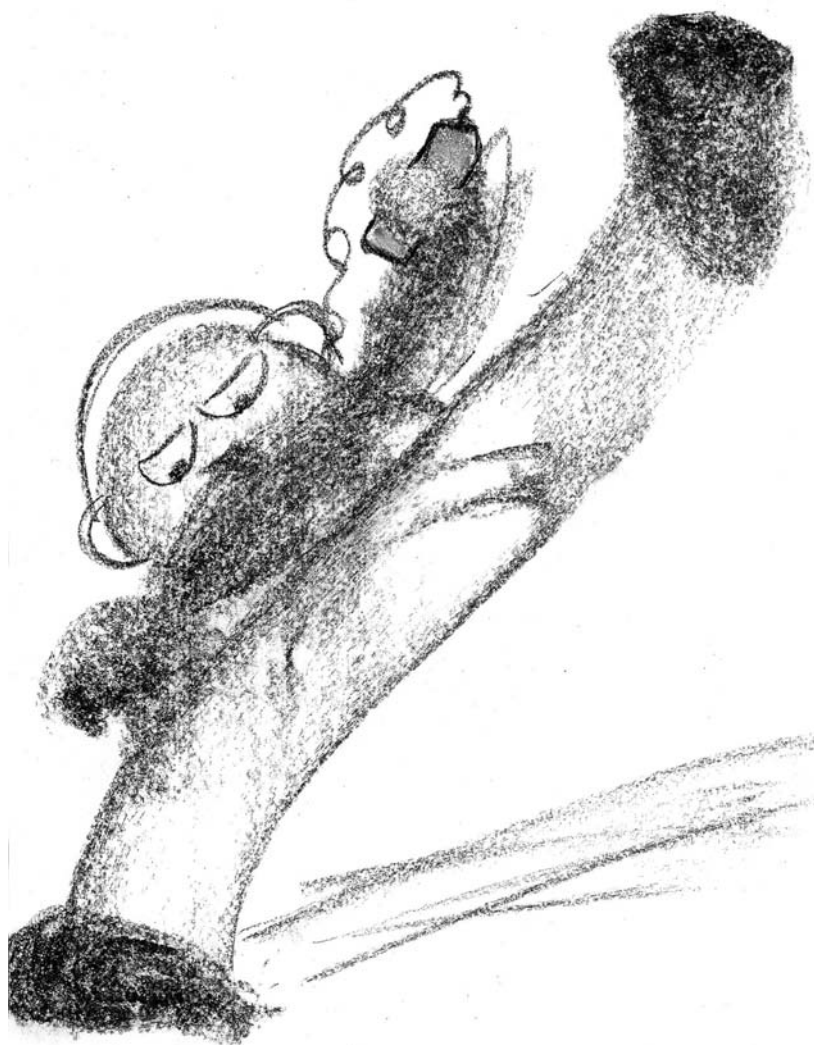
Esa mano derecha tuya baja. Almost imperceptibly. Slowly, se mueve. Me acaricia la espalda, hace pequeños movimientos circulares hacia las nalgas. You hold my butt, pulling me towards you, onto you. Siento eso, your hand cupping me; a la vez mi atención se bifurca, hacia mis dedos, que te acarician el

hombro, el antebrazo. Te juro que I *feel* everywhere: where your hand is moving underneath me, holding me, hacia mi sexo; donde mis dedos se mueven en minúsculo vaivén y te acarician el brazo; donde ahora, my lips replace my fingers and touch your upper arm and I taste you. Sutil. Un poco salado.

I am poised, just slightly above you. Soft moans escape your half-open mouth. Siento el calor de tu ingle, pressing into me. Our clothes are on, still. No estorba la ropa. Ni nos fijamos. As your hand circles toward, me escucho gemir. I move toward you.

Hay una extraña, oximorónica, imposible sensación. Expectant yet satisfied a la vez. There is no idea of reaching, de progreso. Of getting there. Anywhere. We are there. Here. Your skin. Cálida, densa. Your hand on me. Humedad. La otra rozándome los labios like you do, drawing my face toward yours. Tus labios reconociéndome los contornos. No hay noción de urgencia. El tiempo es nuestro. Tiemblo de placer, de anticipación, de presencia. I feel you here with me. Ahora. ■

Magnetic Island (Queensland), Australia, 9 July 2006



Lucy Burnett

Easdale

Whichever way we chose to walk we cut kilometre
diameters across, and always the suggestive sound
of slapping water, the sea that tilted on the north shore rock,
the south west pebbles and the eastern harbour;

and the quarry
always startled us, for our backs were turned against the mainland
shore, as we fixed our gaze upon the cadavered gash of bruised
blue slates, whose distinctive ripples clad the roofs of houses
and cathedrals, castles and estates as far afield as Nova
Scotia, with the sea;

and our reminded gaze would drift
due west, the glints of iron pyrite - fools gold - tempting
us like wisps of phosphorescence to the sprinkled shards of
slate that were the further islands in the Sound, and then,
beyond, the promise and the lie that is a flat horizon.

The Atlantic underlined the vast extent of sky.
The moods it cast upon us were like textured warnings, severed
by the hissing squawks, the seagulls' guttural stops that scratched
across the blues until the day would morph to nights that sprung
staccato swathes of stars, unhidden constellations
that demanded recitation - perseus, gemini, orion - our prayers
spread above us like a parachute above
the unlikely hay bale which we lay upon;

and not much else
except some white-washed, slate-capped houses, smoking peat,
the pub, a modern timber hall, which blended like
some mangled driftwood on this tree-free island, huddled, jumbled
round the square (the pockmarked football pitch or wedding green),
the muddy paths unlit by streetlights and the absent cars,
forgotten in a day or two unless you head ashore,
and then our room.

*

I watch the only boatman smoking
in his shed, the corrugated roof a mirror to the sea carved
grooves upon his face and last seen waving drunkenly across
the channel at the policeman on the other shore, that night.
I stroke the bramble scars that line my back and face ashore.

The only thing that points across the channel, flowing, thick
as treacle petrol blue, a tender bended arm just like
the one which wrapped surprisingly around me, an artificial
harbour limb that twirls the boats from slate-embedded rings,
the ropes are gnarled like seaweed and the famous ten-seat ferry.

50



Octopus Sushi

An Xiao

The last time she came out to a guy she was dating, he slapped her. A rough, memorable slap. The guy before that had laughed loudly and asked if she was kidding, and when she said no, he got up and left. No words, no anger, just a swift departure without paying the dinner bill. They were nicer than the men she'd dated a few years before that, when she was a little braver and more curious about sex and large muscles and swaggering gaits. But her confidence still plummeted after their reactions. She took consolation in the fact that none of them had guessed she was anything but a normal girl.

At 5'7", she towered over the other Asian women she saw around the city, but amongst most Americans, she was an average height. After beginning transition, she grew to appreciate her Taiwanese genes, which gave her almost no facial hair, a heart-shaped face with round cheeks and a slim, androgynous figure. Most of the girls at her office envied her good looks; she envied that they had nothing to hide.

Two months later, she sits before this new one of hers. Nobuo. A tall man of Japanese descent with beautiful shoulder-length hair and quiet, peaceful eyes. *Maybe he'll be different*, she tells herself. He studies philosophy full-time, and writes poetry.

"Short Japanese verse," he'd told her. "Haiku-like stuff. It's all I have time for, sadly." He only showed her two of his poems. One about the sunset over Jersey City; the other about a Chinese man at the Port Authority. She didn't really understand them – *why must they be so short?* – but thought they were pretty.

He sips a glass of plum wine and gazes at her plate – three pieces of octopus sushi. "You said you wanted to tell me something important," he says. He's a little tipsy, and the smell of alcohol on his breath brings back memories crushed by therapy and her own bitterness to move on. "What did you want to say?"

They met a few weeks ago the way she met most of her men, at a party hosted by one of her artistic friends. She never really understood artists, how they could devote so much time to something that might not pay off, how they could live on so little. But lately, after so much pain, she's been feeling drawn to

them, the careful way they observe a situation and respond to it from deep inside. She'd dabbled once in painting, but quickly grew frustrated whenever her brush dried out in the middle of a thought.

Her father used to say it was because she was lazy, but she decided she'd much rather work in an office, with spreadsheets and numbers and an easy, calculated stability. She sends him checks regularly, to help with the bills, but really just to show him she's living a normal life. She likes to feel she can be a good daughter.

"I..." She pauses, and reaches for his hand. It's soft, almost as small as hers, better manicured. "I... I'm a little more complicated than you might think."

She sees a string of bright lights passing above her, a man in green scrubs telling her, "You'll be okay, sir, just hold my hand." And the rumblings of a shaky mechanical bed in a white hallway as she travels, travels, fading in and out of consciousness. Back then, she looked marginally attractive as a woman, if she put on the right amount of make-up, but the blood and coughing brought out her masculine qualities. Sir. The word echoed inside her for longer than the shouts of "fucking tranny".

"You can tell me, Jing." He smiles. "I'm a philosophy major, for goodness sake. And a poet. I'm harmless." He massages her hand. His feel strong, masculine. She imagines them brushing against her breasts, her legs wrapped around his waist, his eyes forcing her to surrender beneath him in his cramped uptown studio.

"I know that life is complicated sometimes," he continues. "And you..." He pauses, as if sensing the words welling up inside her, and waits.

"You've probably never met a girl like me," she tells him, as she pokes at her sushi with a chopstick, wondering if he's figured it out. She's always careful to wear a scarf or turtleneck, but sometimes people can sense she was once a boy. She's never quite sure at what point or what gives her away, but they can, and they always give her that knowing smirk that throws her into a panic.

"It's," she whispers. "It... life... is complicated."

She takes a breath. His warm hand is on hers, wrapped around her fingers, his eyes resting on her, not penetrating like most men's eyes. Her watch beeps twice – as it does every hour, on the hour. "We should go," she says. "We still haven't bought our tickets."

Just a few hours before that, she'd promised herself she'd tell him about her past and her present and what she's saving up for, but she doesn't want this moment ripped away from her. She wants this third date to turn into a fourth, the fourth into a fifth, and she wants phone calls late at night and surprise flowers in the office and bickering over groceries when they move in together.

"I'll take care of the bill this time," he says, smiling briefly.

He leaves forty dollars on the tab. The two twenties are crisp, clean, fresh from the ATM.

"When my parents and I first moved here," Nobuo says. "We were damn poor. Not like the other Japanese kids at my school. Now I just plunk a twenty down like it's nothing."

He looks out the window onto this quiet side street in the Village. People walk by – *there are always people* – but she doesn't feel overwhelmed by the numbers like she does in midtown. His jaw is softer than those of the white men she's used to dating. The skin on his cheek reveals the remnants of adolescence, the barely-visible pockmarks. His lips are fuller than hers and his brows thick and defined. *Does he also pluck them once a week?*

"I never imagined I'd be here." His Adam's apple vibrates slightly as he speaks. "In a sushi bar in New York City, dressed well and getting a PhD in some useless major." He smiles. "With a lovely woman sitting across from me."

He is the most beautiful man she's ever met. She paints his lips and lines his eyes and drops a few bangs in front of his forehead. So much like herself, when she was a boy. Sensitive, inward-gazing. His eyes capture a man deep in thought, totally comfortable with himself. A man dealt the right genetic cards.

Outside, the wind pierces through her thin dress, and he wraps his jacket around her, rubs her arms briskly. "Thank you," she whispers. She rests her head on his chest and tells him in her softest voice, "It's been so long...."

He kisses her forehead, a transient kiss, substantial enough to make her think she could tell this man anything, if he just asked, if he used the right words. Her arms slink up underneath his shirt to rest on his warm back, slightly muscular, like hers had been when she played football and lifted weights to stop the other boys from making fun of her.

"Nobuo..." she says, and he tilts her chin up to face him.

For a moment she forgets the secret. She forgets the three uneaten pieces of octopus sushi on her plate. She forgets his arms could crush her if he wished. She forgets the penis tucked carefully between her legs. It's just her and him and the light breeze brushing against them, her skirt swaying gently. ■

Lemon Creek

Lou Dellaguzzo

Hal creeps to the kitchen doorway. In the violet darkness, he sees a familiar shadow. It's nearly midnight. A blue nightgown covers her stout body, except for her breasts – firm but heavy – that rest on her stomach. She caresses herself. Her ashen skin reflects light from the back-porch window. The weak light signals availability.

"There's a tit for each of you," she slurs. Taunts. The same words that woke Hal when she barked them. A sudden breeze connects son to mother. Her scent – sour wine and stale perfume.

The two married men, her longtime neighbors, won't come any closer. She chortles, enjoys the control she has – the abandon – when her husband's on the road. If she didn't despise the men, she might do more. No matter. The guys finish in five minutes. She covers herself, retreats from the bleached light. But she watches. Waits for further confirmation of her power. With a tired flourish, each man shakes some bills in the air, slides the cash under a brittle clay pot used for nothing else. Other tokens of their visit hang on gritty weeds.

Heads bent, they hurry home. Scramble over wooden fences that divide the houses in this run-down, blue-collar neighborhood, far below the mansioned hills of Staten Island. Managing not to fall this time, she wobbles to the back door to retrieve the cash. Hal waits for his chance. His mother fumbles, dribbles a few curses. The screeching door covers his escape to bed.

"You'll make me late my first day," Paul says.

It's still early. But the boy has breakfast to make before his long walk to school, where he is starting eighth grade. His hands tire from massaging his mother's calves.

"Five minutes more," she says.

"Okay, okay." He frees one hand for the ashtray, snuffs a smoldering cigarette she lit and forgot. The smoke makes him dizzy. His numb hands push against flesh. The mattress wheezes.

"Your brother would've been in tenth grade today," she says in between pleasurable groans. Her

words fill the room with thorns. "He was so perfect, your brother. Never any trouble."

The words ricochet off the box springs, along the yellowed wallpaper.

"Things would be much better if your brother were here." And you were not, she thinks, with a lazy guilt that undermines her even more this hot, sunny day.

"I'm hungry," Paul says, although he wants to get away.

His mother rolls over. "Then you better go make something."

About forty kids stand in a line outside their new classroom, unaccountably locked. They sound more like four hundred. High young voices collide with beige tiled walls. In the stifling hallway, the kids smell blood: a callow teacher. Anxiety dents her wide brow, creases her gray eyes as she attempts order.

Hal meanders to the line's end. Against his thigh, he smacks an oversized red cap. Last school year, he wore it to hide patchy bald spots that appeared for no reason. His wavy brown locks grew back over summer. He still takes the cap wherever he goes, in case his hair disappears again. He got into fights over the bald spots. Short on sleep – long on the memory of his mother's drunken ritual – he is eager for battle his first day back. Someone easy. A sure thing. He needs to slug away without having to cover himself.

What about you? Hal checks out the tall redhead in front of him. Too big. Too many friends. Fucking nail his dick to the wall.

He scouts the line of kids for vulnerable prey. The draft from an open door wafts a spare, gamy smell from behind.

Here we go.

To avoid the usual trouble, Paul keeps a good distance from the class line. He thinks he might make it into the room without incident. The kids finally start to move. But then Hal pivots. His furious brown eyes settle on the new arrival's unkempt blonde hair and sleepy blue eyes. The wrinkled plaid shirt with missing buttons. Paul knows it's no use. Time to deal. His

classroom's the only one this side of the main staircase. And the dumb new teacher makes a big mistake. She leads her noisy students into the room, instead of waiting to make sure no stragglers remain. Like two boys about to rumble.

"What're *you* doing in my class, fucking fish boy," Hal whispers when the thick door shuts. "Yeah. You stink like a rotten fish, motherfucker. No one wants you here." The first blow is always the hardest to make when the moment arrives. More words are needed to fuel him. They'll carry him like a wave, smack into the other boy. "You stink so much, you should climb up my ass," he says with a wicked grin. He gets closer. Shoves the other boy. Bouncing on his toes, he is ready to cause pain. "I bet you'd like it in there," Hal digs at the taunt. "Way up my ass."

"I bet you'd like me there, too," Paul says.

And the boys reach out to each other – with fists and feet – but most blows hit only air. His opponent's spunk surprises Hal. Paul's blue eyes turn crazy when they seize the other boy's fury. He adds the stolen anger to his own buried rage. Confused by the speed of their blows, the boys grab for anything in reach. His frustration mounting, Paul lunges. He clamps onto Hal's cap, pulls it by the bill, along with a few sweaty brown hairs.

With both hands, Hal frees his precious cap. Enraged, he swats at Paul's face. The back snap stings as it lands repeatedly on tender, fair skin. Dry red streaks form along one cheek. Drowning in all the anger, Paul imagines someone else inflicts the blows. A familiar large hand flies toward him. Not Hal's. Out of habit, he stops protecting himself. A few more blows with the cap, and Hal can't go on hitting the reddened face – not with those blue eyes that reproach him for more than this fight.

"Look what you made me do," he says. Borrowed words. A conditioned response – like Paul's sudden, haunted passivity. Hal turns away. Mumbling to himself, he strides to class. His victim counts the steps. When they reach twelve, he follows.

His hand has a mind of its own. But he can't stop writing his father's favorite poem on the yellow lined notepaper. He's never found writing so painful – and pleasing – before. Now for his drawing. He sketches rapidly as the teacher whines at her students about the Age of Discovery. A large, roll-down map of the world hangs in front of the blackboard. When the teacher points at the blue Atlantic, he passes his note to Paul, who sits next to him in the back row.

Is the note real? Paul wonders. Often he confuses the imaginary with what passes for reality. Soft red lips move as he reads the neat blue script: *There are small ships. There are big ships. But the best ship, is friendship.*

And the drawing: It's a boat with the name –

Prince Hal – written on the sail. The vessel points downward into rippling water. On the surface, Paul's own name floats in wavy letters drawn with care. He glances over to the next row. Morning light glistens along Hal's profile. His skin turns coppery.

Hal can see the other boy's pencil move over his note.

The paper hisses as it slides along his desk. He examines the reworked drawing. In the water – near the sailboat – a lone stick figure struggles. The word *HELP* fills a cartoon bubble. Looking over, he sees that Paul – red-faced from more than blows – tries to return his gaze, but can't. A boy's pride.

He tries to signal Paul's attention, doesn't notice the teacher as she makes her way down the aisle to look at – then confiscate – his note, without interrupting her lecture.

"Can I use the bathroom?" he asks her slender, retreating back.

The soap dispenser holds a full bag of thick, green liquid. Good thing it's the first day of class. Once the dispensers go empty, they pretty much stay that way all year. "Let go, you dumb fuck." Hal yanks at the fat plastic pouch. At last, the thin feeder tube slips out of the dispenser slot. With difficulty, he loops the tube around his finger, slips it into a tight knot. He rinses off any escaped soap, and dries the emerald pack with paper towels before shoving it in his baggy jeans pocket.

"Quit worrying," he says, when the other boy lags behind. "It ain't that much further."

Paul's never walked so far into the oak park before. He gets lost easily. "Seems a lot longer than thirty minutes." He is suspicious again that the boy who beat him – then befriended him – might reverse himself in this secluded area of old trees and rambling bushes.

"So maybe it's an hour," Hal says. "Big fucking deal. Like I said at school, it'll be an adventure – at least for you. *I* do it any time I want. Sometimes a whole crew of guys comes with me." He lies to make the other kid comfortable – and himself popular. "My brother used to come."

Paul knows of Richie, has seen him around with Hal. The notorious Davis brothers. "You guys don't look much alike," he says.

"Richie takes after my dad; he's blonde and blue-eyed, too. Like you."

"Like me?" Paul says, then remembers his face – the last time he saw it in a mirror and realized it was his reflection.

All summer long, he'd imagined he was an Asian prince. The one he saw in a televised story about a caged, mechanical song bird. The prince had long black hair and onyx, almond-shaped eyes. He was tall and learned. Nothing like Paul. As long as he ignored

his body – his face – he could be that foreign, far-away boy. But whenever he washed, had to pay attention to his own skin, the princely facade dissolved.

“Don’t you even know what color hair you got?” Hal says.

He wants to shake Paul. He misses his brother Richie.

The boys used to take long hikes down to the island’s south shore. They liked to watch migratory birds in their marshy sanctuary. The black ducks and crested cormorants seemed to calm Richie, who always had trouble keeping still. Hal has no one else who’ll put up with his quick temper. His bossy nature.

Except maybe Paul.

“Say something,” he orders.

“I heard your brother got put away.” That’s how Paul’s father said it – the last time he came around to toss some money on the kitchen table, then leave.

“Here it is,” Hal says, his voice tight.

The steep embankment – designed to forestall erosion in this hilly area of the park – is much lower. About seven feet. Lost in his thoughts, Paul didn’t hear the clear water sing along its rocky bottom.

“It’s a creek,” he says.

“Well, yeah, you dumb fuck,” Hal says. “Why do you think the place is called Lemon Creek Park?”

“What are we supposed to do with it?” Paul’s never fished before. But he knows you’re supposed to have a rod and reel.

“We’re going to horse around in the water.” Wash in it, too, Hal thinks – although he’s not sure about the big brainstorm he had back in class, after he saw the drowning stick figure sketched on his note. Paul’s supposed to make him feel better.

“Look at that.” Hal points below to a wide, flat rock. It rests close to the embankment like a small island. “All we got to do is hang from the edge and land on that big stone. We undress there. Don’t want some jerk-off swiping our clothes while we’re in the water.”

Paul’s eyes grow wide, suspicious – the descent looks impossibly far. “How do we get back up?”

“How do you figure?” Hal makes a retard face. “We high jump, grab onto the ledge and lift ourselves over. Do I got to draw you another picture?”

“I don’t know.” Paul needs some time to think. “Where’s your brother now?” he says.

“Fuck this.” Hal sits atop the embankment, kicks his legs in the air. “Yahoo, Mountain Dew.” Like a wiry animal, he lands on the rock. He shrugs off his backpack, removes his red cap, his black-top sneakers and socks. “You can go back by yourself,” he says. “You fucking stinky fish boy motherfucker. I’m finished with you. For good.”

The words sound worse than “put away,” more final.

“Okay. I’m sorry,” Paul says. “Can I come down now?”

After a suspenseful moment, “Whatever,” Hal

replies from below. But when Paul lets his legs dangle, Hal grabs them tight and just about carries the clumsy boy down. The close contact makes the water doubly attractive.

“Man, you really stink,” he says. “Sooner we get your smelly self in there, the better off we’ll *both* be. Fucking you quit that,” he orders when Paul’s eyes get shiny. “The only wet I want to see is down there.” He points to the gently flowing water, bright with sunrays stenciled by leafy trees. “Get undressed. Unless you want me to toss you in as you are.”

“Fuck you,” Paul says. He fumbles with his shirt buttons.

“That’s more like it.” Hal says.

It’s awkward for Paul – the undressing. What do I look like? What does Hal look like? What will he think? He strips quickly, wishing he were that handsome Asian prince again. Or anyone else.

Hal can’t help noticing the gray streaks of dirt that line Paul’s limbs. They darken to black between his toes. Some pink marks – (caused by a laundry rope lashed in midnight anger) – curve along the thighs and buttocks. They’re lean legs. Muscular by nature. So white under the film of soil, fermented sweat. Gold in spots where the sun hits his flat chest and thin arms in dancing patterns.

The two boys lock eyes, each feeling awkward. Hal escapes into the water. His sharp calves cut through the bubbly, clear creek like the prow of a boat.

“Jesus Fucking H. Christ – it’s cold in here.” When he sees the other boy back away, he turns rigid. “Get in or, I swear, you’re on your own.”

Paul inhales loudly as he sinks both feet into the water that reaches mid-thigh. The smooth, mossy rocks are slippery. He loses his balance, falls backwards with a stinging wet wallop. “Keep your mouth shut,” he hears before his ears fill with water.

“You ain’t supposed to drink the stuff. It could make you sick,” Hal says, after Paul surfaces, treads back to the rock. “Shit. I almost forgot the fun part.” Hal’s wet hands darken the gray backpack as he claims the squishy bag of emerald soap, opens the knotted tube with a jagged pen knife. Shimmering green oozes out.

“What’s that stuff for?”

Paul’s companion doesn’t explain. His shifty smile could mean anything.

I’ll get used to it, he thinks, and braces for the worst. It’s a big relief to see Hal turn the green liquid into a jade lather he rubs across his chest and sinewy arms.

“What’d you think it was – paint?” Hal says, laughing. “Or something to hurt you with? You’re such a dick, man.” But he is a little pissed. “Come here, Stinky Paulie.” He gestures with his large, graceful hand – like a bird’s wing against the dappled sunlight. “You need a good washing a lot more than I do.”

“Screw you,” Paul says. But he can’t wait to get closer.

In his haste, he falls on his ass against the smooth rocks that yield in their soft bed. With a splash, the other boy squats nearby. Both of them are up to their shoulders in chilly, shimmering water.

"You're a clumsy fuck." Hal grips the clear emerald bag between them like found treasure. His to share. "Come on and cup your hands for me. Make like a monkey. Do what I do,"

"I know how to wash, you prick," Paul says, embarrassed but eager.

A green worm of soap wiggles out the feeder tube to form a fluid jewel in his waiting hands. Hal squirts some soap over his own wet head, rests the bag on the broad flat stone. Then gently. He washes his wavy brown hair gently. He doesn't want to provoke another round of patchy baldness – the doctor's reassurances aside.

Paul mimics the other boy. The slow, deliberate movements help him remember what it's like to touch himself and really feel it. Fingers roam his round head. Comb through straw-blond hair. My own hair, he thinks, as if he'd never felt it before.

"I'm going under!" Hal squeezes his nose and dives backward. Soap bubbles crackle atop the water as they explode. He rises from the wet, smiles with stinging eyes. "And now you." He jumps on the other boy and plunges his head to the bottom.

"Too rough." Paul sputters, gasping for air. But he doesn't make a big deal of it when he sees Hal stroke himself with soapy hands, at ease in his angular body. His drenched skin has the luster of polished metal. That's how I want to be, he thinks. That's *who* I want to be. And he washes himself, imagines the foam can turn his pale skin honey-colored, mold his torso into a chiseled column.

"Tell me about Richie," Paul says. "Why'd your brother have to go away?"

"Sit down, motherfucker." Hal slaps the water, his face contorted, the way he looked when they fought in the school hallway. "Right here," he points. Too close for Paul, but he obeys. He studies the other boy's small, upturned nose – the angular cheeks and widening chin. He wants to touch that face, examine the maturing planes. Make them his own.

"Last year, me and Richie robbed a couple old fucks," Hal says. "Some guy and his wife. In their house. It was late at night. Richie snuck in through a window. I did look-out on the front porch."

"Where'd they live?"

"Down the block from you," Hal says, as if the crime could easily have occurred elsewhere.

"What'd Richie take?"

Hal shrugs. "What do you think, stupid? He took money. He saw the old prick walking home from the bank that day."

"So, it was your brother's idea."

"Yeah. And it was Richie's idea to beat the shit out of them. Something about decrepit old people makes him crazy sometimes. He took off his belt and let 'em have it. The old guy more."

Paul's not sure he wants to know, but asks anyway. "What'd *you* do?" And holds his breath for an answer.

"Like I told you, I was outside. I only found out what Richie did after the cops picked him up. He never ratted on me." Hal grabs a fallen oak leaf, twirls it nervously between his fingers. When he lets go, it floats to the other boy.

"Are they okay now?" Paul catches the mangled leaf.

"They who?"

"The two old people."

Hal chops at the water as if he were trying to hurt it – as if the water were someone's skin. "Who cares about them? My brother's in jail because those shit-bags identified him. Maybe he should've killed them," he says in an eerily distant voice. "Keep them from talking – what good are those old fucks anyway?"

His eyes cut through the other boy. "I think Richie beat them because they stank like you do. Like you used to. Maybe I ought to kill *you*. Drown you now so you can die clean. Hold you under until your blue eyes roll up in your head. Nobody'd ever know." He gets on his knees, wraps his large hands on the other boy's shoulders. "I've always wanted to kill someone. See what it feels like."

"Quit trying to scare me." Paul is almost certain the other boy's just being a jerk-off. But he is rattled by Hal's eyes, the way they look at him – seem to see someone else.

"Whose trying to scare you?" Hal says.

"People'd find out."

"No they wouldn't. And no-one gives a fuck about you anyway."

"Lay off me." With his forearms, Paul breaks the strong grip on his shoulders and jumps to his feet, almost falling on top of Hal. "Did you ever think *you* might lose if you tried to kill me?" he shouts. "Well, you might. You just might. I can get angry, too, you know. I can hate people, too. Lots of people." In a froth of creek water, he strides back and forth – a white streak in the dappled sunlight – inches from Hal, who slouches in the water. A harmless kid again. Sad.

Paul sits near the other boy as if there were never any threat between them. "What happened?" he says. "I thought we were having fun. It felt like fun." He thinks about the note – the poem – Hal gave him in school, where the two sat side by side. "I thought we were friends." He gazes at the long channel of water ahead of them.

"Who'd want to be friends with you?"

But slowly, Hal moves closer, leans against his companion. "We better go," he whispers, like it's a secret, like they're in a sacred place. But it takes

awhile to begin. For different reasons, they both feel safe in the chilly, secluded water. An island unto themselves.

"Don't put those on again," Hal says when Paul reaches for his underwear.

"Why not?"

"You just took a bath. That's why not."

"Well, you put yours on."

"But mine ain't filthy, you dope."

"Fuck you," Paul says. But he leaves his stained shorts – his smelly T-shirt and socks – on the damp rock. He grabs his sports shirt and jeans. "Are these clean enough for you, or should I walk home naked?"

Home. A place they don't want to think about. A place where neither boy can take the other and expect any welcome.

"Once I'm up," Hal says. "Throw me the backpack.

He squats low, then shoots into the air, his strong hands ready. In one try, he makes it to the embankment ledge. He could ask for a boost to ease his ascent, but he wants to impress with his strength and self-reliance. "Okay, you can toss it." He peers down at the other boy, whose hair shines like a yellow beacon.

Paul's turn. He jumps. And jumps again.

"You got it," Hal says, when Paul grabs hold of the rough ledge. But the dangling boy doesn't have the strength to lift himself.

"Try harder, man."

Paul's right cheek is pressed against the sheer embankment. A trail of red ants marches toward him along the pebbly surface. His hot breath makes them change course. "Forget it. I think I'm going to need wings."

"Hold on. I'll grab your wrists and pull you up." No matter how he tries, Hal can't get enough leverage. "Don't let go, or we'll both go down."

"I'm getting tired," Paul complains.

"Nah. This ain't going to work." Hal lets go. "We got to do this some other way. You better drop down." Which Paul does – almost falling backwards into the creek.

The boys regard each other. Paul sees reproach. "I don't mean to be trouble."

"Just shut up. I'm thinking." Hal searches for a handy vine or branch to ease the climb. No luck. He explores further away from the creek, out of sight. Paul wants to shout. He's been abandoned. He really is too much trouble.

"I got it." Hal's voice, muffled, triumphant. He leans over the ledge. "Hi, crybaby."

"Where'd your jeans go?" Paul stares up at the half-dressed boy.

"Here they are!" Hal drops one pant leg over the ledge. "You grab hold of the end real tight. Then you can walk up the embankment, while I pull you with the other leg. The way mountain climbers do on TV."

"That's really smart," Paul says.

"Yeah, I know." Hal's proud of himself, pleased with the compliment.

It's disorienting and frightening to walk sideways up a slippery wall, but Paul manages. The worn jeans feel thin in his fists, the legs stretched like an elastic band, pulled to its limit. Was that a tearing sound or his sneakers against rough concrete? He stills himself, tries to listen past his breathing. Blood like a rubber mallet inside his ears. He searches the length of Hal's pant leg. Around the crotch, where the seams intersect, the fabric turns pale and flimsy. That's where it could rip, he thinks. If it happens.

"You're almost there." Hal's voice, strained but clear.

And it's really true; Paul can start believing now. Just a little ways more. A little... He imagines he is light as air, weightless as a leaf, floating.

As he nears the top, his body still at a right angle with the wall, Hal stops pulling.

"What's the matter?" His hands are getting tired, numb.

"I could let go right now," Hal says. "Just let you drop. That's the kind of power I have."

Paul studies the other boy's ambiguous smile and unyielding brown eyes. He won't beg.

"Do what you want, man."

How much could the fall hurt? Worse still, what would he do alone and injured? It's impossible to look at Hal's face anymore, so he stares at the large hands that control his fate. Veins bulge like angry blue rivers. Knuckles press their bony whiteness against rough tan skin. Fingers grasp the fabric as if glued to it. But for how long? How... And then suddenly he's drawn upward fast. Three clumsy steps and he's fully upright, digging his heels into yielding black soil.

Hal keeps pulling on his jeans, drawing the other boy nearer.

They were never closer. ■

Chroma: Biographies

58

George Aristidopoulos is an Australian Greek writer living in London. He is currently studying at Birkbeck College in London. He's been a rock singer, photographer/artist, and has worked in the film industry. George likes cigarettes, chocolate, chavs, and suntans with pert white arses.

Lisa Asagi is the author of the chapbooks "Physics" and "Twelve Scenes at 12 a.m." She frequently collaborates on film, performance and visual art projects -most recently, the films "Kieu" by vu t. thu ha and "[os]" by ming-yuen s. ma. Lisa is based in Honolulu and San Francisco.

Nadia Attura works mainly in documentary and editorial photography. She has a degree in Photojournalism from the London College of Communication. Recent commissions include warehouses for Beach Master Magazine and a poster campaign for Theatre Royal. She's documenting Elvis impersonators. Her summer project is "The Beach" in Rome.

Jay Bernard lives and works in London; she was a 2005 winner of the Foyle's Young Poet Award and has since read and performed her work throughout the UK. Her first collection is due out this summer.

Lucy Burnett was born in Scotland but is currently living in Manchester where she is completing an MA in Creative Writing. She was shortlisted for the 2006 Chroma Queer International Poetry Competition, has been published in Citizen 32, and has read her work extensively around the UK and Ireland.

Susana Chávez-Silverman is Chair of Romance Langs. & Lits. at Pomona College in Claremont, CA. She specializes in gender and sexuality studies, autobiography/memoir, and poetry. Her book, *Killer Crónicas: Bilingual Memories* was published in 2004.

Angel Cortez is an American in London. He brings a background in dance, theatre and anthropology to his Artwork. Angel is also a member of the band Attack Of The Fits.

Brian Cronwall teaches English at Kaua'i Community College in Hawai'i. His poems have been published in journals in Hawai'i, Mainland USA, Australia, Japan, and the UK.

Lou Dellaguzzo's stories have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary journals. New works are slated for *Harrington Gay Men's Literary Quarterly*, *Sex by the Book*, and *Best Gay Romance 2008*. Lou has completed a short-story collection called *Secret Shoppers* and is at work on a novel.

Lynn Foote has had poetry published widely in magazines, and is presently writing a book about the North. She has written a novel based on her years in Japan and is now working at Kings College London.

Wendy French facilitates writing sessions in healthcare settings. She has two chapbooks published by tall lighthouse press and one full collection of poetry *Splintering the Dark* from Rockingham Press. She is interested in poetry on the edge and will be the next Chair of Lapidus, Literary Arts and Personal Development.

Irras Han is an American poet/photographer based in Geneva, Switzerland. After giving up trying to find a country to call home, she now enjoys the freedom that comes with being rootless. Her poetry has appeared in *Niederengasse*, *Tryst*, *SOFTBLOW*, *Magma* and others. Her photography can be found in various Magazines, including *Aesthetica* and *The Wolf Magazine*.

Theresa Heath reviews queer literature and has published short fiction and articles on a queer theme. She currently sells books but is about to start postgraduate study, for which she may need to sell a kidney.

CAR Hills is former editor of PEN News. His "Clapham Omnibus" column was published in *Prospect*, and his short stories appear in *Quadrant* (Sydney). He was one of the leading contributors to *The Reader's Companion to 20th-Century Writers*.

Samuel Hodge has 10 years worth of work behind him that documents his life and which he is now starting to exhibit. He really doesn't like to try too hard. See more: truth-beauty-cock.blogspot.com.

Peter Ibruegger creates drawings based on the stories of Narcissus and the Uroboros, an archetypal symbol of eternity. In his latest project, he applied his drawings onto an exclusive range of hand-printed wallpaper and ceramic tiles. See more at peteribruegger.com

Kobi Israel studied at the New York Film Academy and at Camera Obscura in Tel-Aviv. He moved to London in 2002. He was a finalist in the Schweppes Photographic Portrait Prize 2003. His most recent book is *Intimate Strangers*. See more at kobi-israel.com.

Lynne Jamneck is a South African writer and photographer. Her work has appeared in various markets, including *Best Lesbian Erotica 2003/2006/2007*, *Diva* and *Curve* magazines. She lives in New Zealand. Read more: lynnejamneck.livejournal.com

Maria Jastrzebska was born in Warsaw and came to London as a child. She has published three poetry collections including *Syrena* (Redbeck Press) and was co-editor of *Forum Polek* a bilingual anthology of women's writing. She lives in Brighton and co-runs *Queer Writing South* and a multi-media open garden at outskirts-art.co.uk.

Simon Leah was born in Exeter, Devon. He has emigrated to Australia three times and is currently based in Tasmania where he lives in a tin shed with his 13 year old cat, Percy, and an eMac called Please. He still maintains a sing-songy accent.

Sadie Lee's solo shows include the National Portrait Gallery, Manchester Art Gallery and Museum of Modern Art, Slovenia. Her obsession with the 1970s is authentic - down to her vintage Ford Capri and liberal application of Hi Karate aftershave. Apparently the birds really go for it.

Alex Mankowitz is a writer and Earl's Court native, now based far from home in Willesden Green. She is currently working on a play about psychosis, restraint and keeping up appearances.

Lepa Mladjenovic was co-founder of the lesbian rights group *Labris* and of *Belgrade Women in Black*. She has written and spoken widely about women's rights and violence. For her work in Serbia on behalf of gay and lesbian rights, Lepa received the *Felipe de Souza Award*.

Carlos Molina is a self-taught illustrator, obsessed with bodies and landscapes. His drawings hide self-portraits that depict the innumerable ways of being and feeling. Carlos shows and sells his work in a permanent virtual exhibition at carlosmol.com.

Jim Nawrocki's poetry recently appeared in *Yuan Yang*, *Kyoto Journal* and the *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*. He has also appeared in *Poetry*, *Poetry Daily*, *modern words*, *The James White Review* and others. He lives in San Francisco.

Christopher Nield works as a copywriter. For two years he has contributed a weekly poetry column to *The Epoch Times* and is completing his first collection of poems. His poetry has been accepted for publication by *PN Review*, *Ambit*, *The Liberal* and *The Rialto*. He was one of the winners of the *Keats-Shelley Prize 2006*.

Ryan Riddington is a Fine Art Sculpture graduate whose work considers the making and 'post-production' of objects as well

as their initial conception. These constructions, whether in shadow, card or metal form, drawn or photographed, are manipulated then documented and displayed, each outcome creating the possibility of further development.

Beldan Sezen lives in Amsterdam. She is a cartoonist and illustrator, currently working on her first graphic novel. She sees her challenge in the impact of a simple line. She has exhibited her drawings and paintings, and her latest work is an online cartoon: misseggsworld.blogspot.com.

Micky Silver has been writing short stories and longer works of fiction for some time, and has had several articles published in academic books. He lives and works in London, and is currently writing other stories and a novel.

Alan C. Smith is a Bermudian poet and performer and digital artist. He has been published in *POUI*, *In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself*, *Caribbean Writer*, the award winning *Under the Moon and Over the Sea: A Collection of Caribbean Poems*, *Poems United: A Commonwealth Anthology* and *Bermuda Anthology of Poetry*.

Michael Sutherland studied Environmental Biology at university. Never finished the degree. Currently with the OU. He likes Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Hamburg, canals, rivers, seas, and

great big shipping ports. He recently discovered he has emotion mediated visual synesthesia (he thought everyone had it). Now tagging around his latest effort, a novel, *Invisible Monsters*.

Jenny Thompson currently lives in Norwich. She moved there from Leeds to study for an MA in creative writing at the University of East Anglia. She writes both poetry and prose, and plans next to travel and to write.

Mark Wagstaff lives and works in London, which provides the setting for most of his stories. Mark has self-published two well-received novels: *After Work and Claire*, and a selection of short pieces, *Blue Sunday Stories*. Details at markwagstaff.com.

An Xiao is a poet, photographer and activist. She has featured across the New York City area, alongside writers such as Leslie Feinberg, Vittoria Repetto and Tamiko Beyer, and her work has appeared in *Simply Haiku* magazine and M. Kei's tanka anthology, *Fire Pearls*.


16-20 & 23-27 MAY

LAZLO PEARLMAN IN

HE WAS
A SAILOR.
THE SEA
WAS
INSIDE
HIM

DIRECTED BY
CHRISTINE HARMAR-BROWN

SOMETIMES
THERE
WERE
STORMS...



the drill hall

BOX OFFICE
020 7307 5060
www.drillhall.co.uk

spread the word inspiring London's writers

Spread the Word presents:

Bodyworks


A six-week poetry course for intermediate writers **with Saradha Soobrayen**

This course will open your creative process to new stimuli and help you discover poetic inspiration in the human body. Through group discussions and writing exercises you will delve into the latent emotional, physical, spiritual, and political metaphors of our physicality, and use them to inform your writing.

This course is for poets in the process of creating a collection.

When: 10, 17, 24, 31 July; 7, 14 August, 6.30-8.30pm
Where: Poetry Studio, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2
Cost: £50 / £24 concessions
To book: (020) 7735-3111, abi@spreadtheword.org.uk
 see also: poetsandwritersforum.blogspot.com

Saradha Soobrayen received an Eric Gregory Award in 2004 and has led poetry workshops and mentoring for writers across London. Her poems are published in the anthologies: *New Poetries IV*, *Oxford Poets*, *New Writing 15*, and *I Am Twenty People!* She is the Poetry Editor of *Chroma*.



George Aristidopoulos
Lisa Asagi
Nadia Attura
Jay Bernard
Lucy Burnett
Susana Chávez-Silverman
Angel Cortez
Brian Cronwall
Lou Dellaguzzo
Lynn Foote
Wendy French
Irras Han
Theresa Heath
CAR Hills
Samuel Hodge
Peter Ibruegger
Kobi Israel
Lynne Jamneck
Maria Jastrzebska
Simon Leah
Sadie Lee
Alex Mankowitz
Lepa Mladjenovic
Carlos Molina
Jim Nawrocki
Christopher Nield
Ryan Riddington
Beldan Sezen
Micky Silver
Alan C. Smith
Michael Sutherland
Jenny Thompson
Mark Wagstaff
An Xiao

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

£4.95/\$10/€8